# A CRITIQUE OF THE CREATIVE WORKS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE AND VAIDEHI WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON REWRITING MYTHS

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Thesis Submitted to Kannada University. Hampi
for the Degree of

## *Doctor of Philosophy*

*Submitted by:*

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# CERTIFICATE

I certify that Malini Achar B. has written this thesis ***A Critique of the Creative Works of Shashi Deshpande and Vaidehi with a Special Focus on Rewriting Myths*** under my supervision for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, of Kannada University, Hampi and that the thesis is fit for submission to the Kannada University, Hampi for the award of the Ph.D. Degree.

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Place: Puttur

Date: 24.01.2011

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# DECLARATION

I hereby declare that no part of this thesis has been submitted for any degree in this or any other institution of learning and that it is an independent work written by me with the guidance of Dr. H. Madhava Bhat, Vivekananda College, Puttur.

Place: Mangalore

Date: 24.01.2011

Malini Achar B.

**(Malini Achar B.)**

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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

It is now established without a trace of doubt that women's writing in India has had a tradition of its own, although the tradition had to be unearthed, having had no place in the mainstream literature. Scholarly writings of the second half of the twentieth century by critics and researchers have been successful in establishing the truth that if women's works haven't been canonical, it is owing to the patriarchal assumptions of the superior worth of male experience and the prejudice about the enclosed domestic space and women's experiences within it. However, if this is one part of the story, the other side reveals the fact that over the centuries the public and private realities have undermined women's writing in two ways: They have curtailed not only the volume of women's writing, limiting it to the privileged few who could have access to education but also the spontaneity of their expression by imposing strictures on what patriarchy considered indecent. That is why, as Susie Tharu and Lalitha K. have argued, it is important that we understand, "… how the efforts of these women shaped the worlds we inherited, and what, therefore, is the history, not of authority, but of contest and engagement we can claim today. But we also ask, what was the price they paid in these transactions, what they did to concede, and how do those costs and those concessions affect our inheritance."[1]

While trying to trace this history of contest and engagement, Sherin Koshy goes back to the Buddhist period to argue that it was the freedom offered by the Buddhist religion, the way of life it offered to women, and the principle of equality that it propagated that allowed women to pen their thoughts for the first time. Identifying

Therigatha nuns, the contemporaries of the Buddha, as the authors of the earliest known anthology of women's literature in India, Koshy observes that Buddhism offered women the opportunity to break away from the restrictions of home life, a major factor in the rise of Indian women's literature in the early sixth century BC. Although the early forms of writing addressed the issue of personal freedom, the poetry that followed later was a celebration of womanhood and sexuality. The Sangam poets of 100 BC-AD 250 wrote extensively about what it meant to have a female body. The 12th century AD witnessed the medieval Kannada poet, Akkamahadevi, whose life and writing challenged the patriarchal dominance of the world at large. Sule Sankavva, another poet of the Bhakti tradition, who was a prostitute, voiced her sentiments about the duplicity of society in her writing. Economic hardships of women were expressed in the poetry that followed a century later. Janabai, the Varkari saint poet of the low caste Sudra community of Maharashtra, wrote in defence of her lower-caste status criticising the Hindu caste system which the Bhakti tradition had failed to eliminate. The rise of Islam, during the same time brought new perspectives into women's literature in India. Muslim women had the privilege of being literate as literacy complied with the requirements of the Holy Koran which made prayer mandatory for every Muslim, both male and female. Koshy points out that, women used this rule of the religion to not only educate themselves but also write about themselves and their experiences. Thus, in 1587, the *Humayun Nama,* which details the life and history of one of India's most powerful Mughal kings, by Princess Gul-Badan Begum came into being. Two centuries later, around 1730, compositions of Muddupalini, a courtesan in the kingdom of the Nayaka kings of Tanjavur in the south of India, by the title *Radhika Santwanam* saw the light of the day. It is worth noting that her work, accepted in her own time, created a stir in the literary world when they were published almost two centuries later. Another courtesan, raised within the Asaf Jahi Sultanate in the

Mughal Empire, was Mahlaqa Bai Chanda and her poetry was collected and published after her death in 1824 as *Gulzar-e-Mahlaqa.*

After tracing women's writing from the Buddhist period to the 18th century, Koshy records that around the 18th century, a combination of factors led to the decline of women's writing in India. She points out that as a result of princes and kings losing their kingdoms and being restricted by a small privy purse, during the dominance of the East India Company, there was loss of patronage to women in courts. This meant the loss of education for women and the production of women's literature almost came to a standstill. After these observations about the lull in women's writing in the 18th century, Koshy proceeds to throw light on the trend of educating women which began again in the late 19th century. The rise of the reformist movement in India saw more women's participation in rebelling against British rule leading to a new stage in the development of women's literature in India with the works produced revolving around the freedom struggle and the reform and nationalist movements. Although there were still women such as Bhabani and Jogeswari whose writings in the early 19th century questioned the patriarchal dominance of husbands, the majority concentrated on the freedom struggle. The earliest woman writer during the reformist period was Savitribai Phule, who along with her husband championed the cause of women's education. She was the first woman teacher in modern Maharashtra and together with her husband started the first school for girls. Her writing which upheld the cause of the untouchables carried the mark of an activist and scholar. Among the women writers who followed was Pandita Ramabai Saraswati who was educated in both English and Sanskrit. In her *The High Caste Hindu Woman* she argued against the patriarchal reading of the Hindu scriptures and early scholarly works of learned Brahmins which encouraged a repressive and demeaning interpretation of scriptures favouring the suppression of women. Toru Dutt of the mid-

nineteenth century was the first Indian woman poet to write in English, and her work depicted archetypes of Indian womanhood, such as Sita and Savitri, showing women in suffering, self-sacrificing roles, reinforcing conventional myths in a patriotic manner. Sarojini Naidu, carrying the epithet of the nightingale of India, published her first set of poems at the age of sixteen and went to England where she was educated at King's College in London, and later at Cambridge. Her writings as an activist and as the governor of Uttar Pradesh reflected her honest and heartfelt concerns about the situation of her country. Towards the mid-nineteenth century more and more women began to write in English. Some of them, such as Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, in works like *Sultana's Dream* created a repertoire of feminist ideologies.

Koshy'synoptic survey, which in parts is based on the path breaking work of Susie Tharu and Lalitha k. by the title *Women Writing in India,* makes it clear that contrary to the common belief, women's writing in India *does* have a tradition. However, it was only in the twentieth century that the genre of fiction came of age. Women's writing in the 20th century moved towards a medium of modernism in which womanist and feminist statements were combined with political messages. Hamsa Wadkar's frank narrative of the world of professional women and Mahashwetadevi's tackling of Naxalite problem can be taken as examples of this trend.

In the second half of the 20$^{th}$ century and the first decade of the 21$^{st}$ century, the proliferation of women's writing has been so high that it is best to concentrate on their shared themes rather than individual works. As Antonia Navarro-Tejero says:

> Recent writers depict both the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman, rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal. The novels emerging in the twenty-first century furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards

the imposition of tradition, some offering an analysis of the family structure and the caste system as the key elements of patriarchal social organization. They also re-interpret mythology by using new symbols and subverting the canonic versions. In conclusion, the work of Indian women writers is significant in making society aware of women's demands, and in providing a medium for self-expression and, thus, re-writing the History of India. [2]

It is in the background of this tradition of women's writing in India that women writers of the contemporary India will have to be studied. The tradition makes it amply clear that when women write, although women are in the epi-centre, the writings reflect the socio-cultural realities of their time.

**THE PERSPECTIVE**

Working on women writers invariably means working within the theoretical perspective of feminism, even if it were to argue that the chosen writers are not feminists. The theoretical perspective of feminism is wrought with complexity. As dialectics it reaches only those who care to approach it, is understood by only those who are initiated into it, is accepted by only those who are willing to exercise reason, and is appreciated by only those who can move beyond the obvious. That is why, even to this day, for both men and women, who have no insight into the dialectics of feminism, the arguments of feminists seem to be the undesirable boldness on the part of a few radical women who are androphobic and envisage a society without men. The other arm of the criticism is that feminism is a western concept; it is ineffective because of its universalistic assumption which does not bear in mind the differences among women belonging to different social and cultural milieu; and it is unnecessarily polemical in introducing a sense of frustration in those women, who, left on their own, would have had no complaints about their

subjugated position as they are unaware of the opportunities that could have been theirs. Each of these notions reeks of deep rooted bias. We have had no compunction in adopting a western system of governance; we have had no hesitation in taking to western modules of education; we have had no qualms in following western dress and food habits; but when it comes to the question of women's rights, we denounce the idea as aping the West. Moreover, critiquing our own culture is not tantamount to aping a foreign culture. It is merely an attempt to cleanse the existing system of inequities. As far as the question of universalistic assumption is concerned, feminists themselves concede that the problems of tribal women cannot be equated with the challenges of urban women and the worldview of a European woman would differ from that of an Indian woman. Feminism, in its advanced theoretical stance, has shown awareness of this glitch and with new insights has comprehensively studied the problems of different sections of women. This brings us to the third and most illogical argument that women, who aren't complaining, better be left to their fate! If a child has impaired vision, do we let the child live in darkness merely because the child has anyway not glimpsed light, or do we employ corrective measures to offer to the child the privilege of sight? A simple analogous stand would show that women who have never had a glimpse of their 'self' ought to be offered that awareness if society is to be termed a just society. Feminism aims at such an equitable society. It tries to deconstruct the mutually exclusive notions of femininity and masculinity as biologically determined categories and thereby opens the way towards an evenhanded society for both men and women. While positing its arguments, feminism has brought under its purview critical debates from disparate fields as anthropology, history, psychology, economics, and even science.

Another reason for the stiff resistance to feminism is the erroneous view that it is individualism. Individualism of the west describes people as "born free yet everywhere in

chains", but in India the individual is usually considered to be just one part of the larger social collective, dependent for survival upon cooperation and self-denial, for the greater good. Feminism, when viewed as individualism, seems to be the self-centred, parochial interest of feminists and hence is decried. But what the feminists try to show is that the larger social collective has always been detrimental to women as it has been influenced by the 'collective unconscious' and hence the idea of self-denial has been reserved for women alone. The collective unconscious comprising faith and deep-rooted emotions excludes reasons and rationality and over the ages has shown the unnatural as natural. Vrinda Nabar's observations on this phenomenon are significant:

> The 'spectrum of thinking' or the 'social consciousness' of a given society at a given time is characterized by three connected but distinct segments. These are the segments of intellectual endeavour, common sense and belief, and what may be best described as collective unconscious.
>
> The connections between the first two of these segments are clear. Today's world of common-sense has been shaped and moulded by the world of intellect of the previous era, and today's intellectual categories will become the cornerstones of tomorrow's commonsensical, widely-accepted social perceptions and understanding. In other words, the accepted norms and boundaries demarcating a people's mind at a given point of time, have an evolutionary history. The process begins with the seeds of ideas, largely confined within the intellectual world, which germinate and take root in the popular consciousness over centuries. The third segment of the collective unconscious by and large excludes reason and rationality and primarily consists of faith and deep-rooted emotions. [3]

Hence it is important to view writers who try to unravel the debilitating force of the collective unconscious through their writings as cultural critics whose attempt is to throw light on meanings generated within cultures. Such writers contest the dominant culture because it is necessary to have "an understanding of what generates meanings by which both the world and we in relation to that world come to be defined ..."[4] Thus, if one has to understand the works of women writers, one has to trace the trajectory of feminism along with the course of cultural criticism.

When we talk about feminism in India, it is necessary to place it initially in the larger context of western feminism to show how it is at once similar to and different from western feminism. Three waves are recognized in the feminist movement of the west. First-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity during the nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United Kingdom and the United States. The feminist agenda of this period focused on officially mandated inequalities, primarily on gaining women's suffrage - the right to vote. The first wave of feminists, focused very little on the subjects of abortion, birth control, and overall reproductive rights of women. Unlike the first wave, the second-wave feminism provoked extensive theoretical discussion about the origins of women's oppression, the nature of gender, and the role of the family in the victimization of women. The fundamental rights and programmes gained by feminist activists of the second wave included the creation of domestic abuse shelters for women and children and the acknowledgment of abuse and rape of women on a public level, access to contraception and other reproductive services including the legalization of abortion, the creation and enforcement of sexual harassment policies for women in the workplace, child care services, equal or greater educational and extracurricular funding for young women, and women's studies programmes. If the second wave feminism found fault with the assimilationist tendency of the first wave feminism, the third-wave

feminism challenged the second wave's essentialist definitions of femininity, which often assumed a universal female identity and over-emphasized experiences of upper middle class white women. A post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality was central to the third wave ideology. However, the roots of the third wave began, in the mid 1980s when feminist leaders, rooted in the second wave feminist idfeology, called for a new subjectivity in feminist voice. They sought to negotiate prominent space within feminist thought for consideration of race related subjectivities. The third-wave feminism, a challenge to the second-wave feminism of 1960s and 1970s, is a term identified with several diverse strains of feminist activity and study from 1990s to the present. It took off with the realization that the heterogeneity of women belonging to different nationalities, ethnic groups, races and cultures was not reckoned with by the second wave feminists. The third wave embraced contradictions and conflicts, and accommodated diversity and change. There was, in this wave, no all-encompassing single feminist idea. The third wave feminism dealt with issues that seemed to limit or oppress women. The central issues were of race, social class and sexuality. However, there were also concerns of workplace issues such as the glass ceiling, sexual harassment, unfair maternity leave policies, motherhood-support for single mothers by means of welfare and child care and respect for working mothers and mothers leaving their careers to raise their children full-time. The third-wave feminists wanted women to be seen as intelligent, political beings with intelligent, political minds; some claimed that there was a lack of diverse, positive female representatives in pop culture. They also wanted to pay attention to alleged unhealthy standards for women in media; the glamorization of eating disorders; the portrayal of women as sexualized objects catering solely to the man's needs, and anti-intellectualism. Consciousness raising activism and widespread education were often the first move the feminists made while envisaging a social change. Thus, if the first wave

feminism had the single goal of the right for women to vote and the second wave the right for women to have access and equal opportunity to the workforce as well as ending of legal sex discrimination, the third wave was a coalescing of diverse aims. This led to the criticism that there was no clear-cut objective for the third wave and that it was only a repetition of what the second wave feminism set forth to do. Thus, feminism over the decades has had different ramifications and complexities, yet has consistently worked towards women's welfare.

The works of feminists whose contributions are considered milestones in the genesis and growth of feminism world over have been collated here, largely, though not entirely, based on *Stri Vadi Sahithya Vimarshe* and *Women's Writing: Text and Context*, the former by Thejaswini Niranjana and Simanthini Niranjana and the latter by Jasbir Jain. It was Mary Wollstonecraft, an eighteenth century British feminist, who, in her path-breaking work *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) incisively criticized the popular fiction that introduced in the mind of female readers the idea that they were incapable, helpless, insignificant human beings given to emotion and not reason. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* by Margaret Fuller has been considered the first major feminist work in the United States and is often compared to Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Although the contributions of these earlier women thinkers were unmistakably a launching pad for the feminists, feminism as a theory started taking shape more concretely with the contributions of French feminist Simone de Beauvoir. Continuing the trend set by her predecessors, Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) questioned the patriarchal society which gave license to man to consider himself the absolute subject, relegating the woman to the status of the *other*, the object. Beauvoir can be considered the first feminist to have claimed the rights of women. The revolutionary statement that one is not born but becomes a woman suffices to indicate her singular

which male writers and male-oriented society had conditioned women and argued that these representations of women as either 'angels' or 'monsters' were artificial. Kate Millett, American critic and activist, in her Ph D thesis titled *Sexual Politics* (1970) revolutionized the critical debates of the second wave feminism by drawing the attention of the world to the culturally imposed stereotypes and by arguing that the politics of the bedroom was as volatile as the politics of the nation. *The personal is the political* was the potent message given by Millett. Mary Ellman came up with a diatribe against stereo types in her work *Thinking about Women.* Kate Millet and Ellman's books provided the inspiration for what is now known as the 'images of women'. Shulamith Firestone, a founder of the New York Radical Feminists, published *The Dialectic of Sex* in the same year as Millett's *Sexual Politics*, insisting that love disadvantaged women by creating intimate shackles between them and the men they loved - men who were also their oppressors. American critic Catherine Mackinnon continued with the idea of the personal being the political and liberated the struggle of women from the confines of the home and brought it to the precincts of social problems. Her attempts brought to light the situations wherein women were victims of sexual harassment. Betty Freidan of America in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) opposed the idea of patriarchy imposing images on women. Freidan hypothesized that women were victims of a false belief system that required them to find identity and meaning in their lives through their husbands and children. Such a system caused women to completely lose their identity in their family. Freidan specifically located this system among the post-World War II, middle-class suburban communities. At the same time, America's post-war economic boom had led to the development of new technologies that were supposed to make household work less difficult, but that often had the result of making women's work less meaningful and valuable. However, in *The Second Stage* she implored women not to neglect human

relationships in the name of equality. Her core concern lay with the home-makers who suffered from the syndrome of having no name, in other words, who suffered from identity crisis. Her attempt was to highlight the importance of the various chores performed by women. Germaine Greer, an Australian-born journalist and feminist, challenged the subjugation of women in the name of femininity and subordination. She pointed out how patriarchy had made women uncomfortable with their own bodies and their physicality. In her book *The Female Eunuch* she argued that the sexual repression of women cut them off from the creative energy they needed to be independent and self-fulfilled. In the later years she observed that there was the gradual and irreversible collapse of the patriarchal family, which was triggered by economic change of women enjoying greater financial independence. Thus, as suggested by the title of Juliet Mitchell's book *The Longest Revolution,* feminism has repeatedly referred to concepts such as gender being a cultural construct, the search for wholeness, the struggle for selfhood, and the need for consciousness raising among women, without losing sight of the importance of education and financial independence. The final understanding Mitchell arrives at is that the liberation of women can only be achieved if the four structures of Production, Reproduction, Sexuality and Socialization, in which they are integrated, are transformed. A modification of any of them can be offset by a reinforcement of another.

The third wave and post-feminists Elle Green, Jennifer Baumgardner, Amy Richards, Barbara Smith, Gloria Anzaldua, Judith Butler, Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Ann Oakley have challenged the paradigm of the second wave as a model based on general assumptions. Although the term Post feminism is not comprehensively defined, what can be surmised is that, like the third wave feminism, this too is in opposition to the second wave. However, unlike the stand of the third wave feminism,

which tries to broaden the feminist struggle, Post feminism concedes that feminism has succeeded in its goal of ameliorating sexism. The various turns and twists in the hitherto witnessed feminisms also suggest that there could be newer and fresher movements like fourth wave feminism or Postmodern feminism.

Indian Feminism is at once similar to and different from the global leanings of feminism. In the awareness that women are oppressed and exploited in society, at work, and within the family and that there is a need for conscious action by both women and men to change this situation, Indian Feminism is not different from feminisms of the world. However, in India, activism has had a stronger role to play than theorizing. That is why, the minute the word feminism is used, it gets equated with different women's movements such as Telengana agitation between 1946 and 1952 in which women were trained as guerrillas, anti-alcohol uprising in parts of western India in 1972, call against dowry between 1980 and 1983, agitations in solidarity with Shah Bano in 1985, movements against Muslim Women's Bill in 1986, campaigns against domestic violence and rape and agitation against *sati* in 1987, and fight against moral policing in the first decade of the turn of the century. The revolts were backed by the setting up of women-welfare oriented establishments like Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in 1972, Stri Sangharsh in 1979, and Centre for Women's Development Studies in the '80s.

Although theoretical feminist writing has been sparse and sporadic, it does not fail to offer a comprehensive view of what took place in the lives of women beneath the veneer of concepts such as social justice and equity. The theoretical approach is possible only through the historical approach to Indian Feminism which marks the period between 1850 and 1915 as the First phase of Indian Feminism. As opposed to the start of the Western feminist movement, India's movement was initiated by men, and later joined by

women. Some of the most influential men involved were: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedker, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar,Keshav Chandra Sen, Malabari Phule, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Mahadev Govind Ranade and Dhondo Keshav Karve. Pandita Ramabai, whose intellectual upbringing matched that of most nineteenth century reformers, remains distinct in her status as the woman leader of the women's cause. Savitri Bai, Phule's wife, is the only other female figure appearing on the scenes of women's emancipation in this stage.

If the colonial venture into modernity brought to the forefront concepts of democracy, equality and individual rights, the rise of the concept of nationalism and introspection of discriminatory practices brought about social reform movements related to caste and gender relations. This first phase of feminism in India was initiated to uproot the social evil of sati, to allow widow remarriage, to forbid child marriage, to reduce illiteracy as well as to regulate the age of consent and to ensure property rights for women through legal interventions.

But the seeds of nationalism sprouting in this period posed women with a peculiar problem. Leela Kasturi and Vina Mazumdar discuss the several distinct points of view that seek to explain the impact of the growth of nationalism in the latter part of the nineteenth century on the situation of women and the debate on women's status in their paper "Women and Indian Nationalism." They highlight the views of Natarajan who argues that with the fervour of nationalism catching up, reform issues, and particularly the women's issues lost their appeal and favour by being subsumed within nationalism. Kasturi and Mazumdar next move on to discuss the views of Ghulam Murshid who continues the debate by pointing out that the new politics of nationalism glorified India's past and tended to defend everything traditional, all attempts at change being viewed as

aping Western manners and values. Murshid's conclusion was that nationalism in this phase fostered conservatism in social beliefs and practices. Kasturi and Mazumdar also highlight Sumit Sarkar's argument which views the early attempts at reform as not so much the outcome of Western liberal or rationalist values, but more an expression of some acute problems of interpersonal adjustments within the family among western educated men. The writers also place before the readers Partha Chatterjee's critique of the liberal content of the early reformers' ideology. In Chatterjee's view, nationalism resolved the women's question in complete accordance with its preferred goals. According to Chatterjee, nationalism was not simply a political struggle for power. On the other hand, it related the issue of independence to every aspect of the material and spiritual life of people. Nationalists, in fact, had to decide what to select from the West and what to avoid or reject because they were equally sensitive about their own self-identity. This dilemma was finally resolved by accepting a dichotomous framework between the 'material' and the 'spiritual' world, between the 'outer' and 'inner' life. Applied to day-to-day living, this dichotomy separated social space into the home and the world, the world being the external, the domain of the material, and the home representing the inner spiritual self, the true identity. The world was the domain of the male whereas the home, of which woman was the representation, in its essence had to remain unaffected by the base activities of the material world. The material superiority of the West had to be matched by learning modern science and arts to overthrow the colonial rule. But the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence had to be preserved, protected and strengthened by women. Thus, through the dichotomy of the home and the world Chatterjee identifies the gendered roles and concludes that women were subjugated in the name of sublimation. The expectation that women had to be the cultural ambassadors of India's spirituality confined them to the home. Although the writers conclude that

Chatterjee ignores several aspects of history while discussing women's predicament in nationalists' ideology in a linear manner, the fact that emerges through their collation of different critical stances is that in the first wave of feminism, women's question got entangled with the nationalist ideology as the nationalists' anti colonial campaign had culture as its launching pad. Chatterjee's contention that Indians who were excluded from the public sphere could have signs of assertion only in the private sphere and that the 'material' and 'spiritual' related to the 'public' and 'private' and the public sphere included colonial administration, court and legislature while the private arena comprised language, literature, art, education and family, effectively explains the invisible forces at work in society.

Thus we see that in India, feminism was theorized differently than in the west. Reconstruction of Indian womanhood as the epitome of culture through social reform movements resulted in political theorization in the form of nationalism rather than feminism.

In the Second Phase between 1915 and 1947, even as the struggle against colonial rule intensified and even as Nationalism sustained as the pre-eminent cause, claiming Indian superiority through the supposedly sanctified model of women continued. But then, the involvement of women with the freedom struggle brought them out of the home to the public domain. Gandhi legitimized and expanded Indian women's public activities by initiating them into the non-violent civil disobedience movement against the British Raj. He exalted their feminine roles of caring, self-abnegation, sacrifice and tolerance making a special place for those in public space. Women-only organizations like All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) emerged bringing to the forefront questions centred on the scope of

women's political participation, women's franchise and leadership roles in political parties.

This resulted in the introduction of the franchise and civic rights of women in the Indian constitution. There was provision for women's upliftment through affirmative action, maternal health and child care provision (crèches), equal pay for equal work etc. It is now an uncontested fact that women in India did not have to struggle for basic rights as did women in the West. But the flip side of women's position during this phase is equally true. Rumina Sethi in *Myths of the Nation: National Identity and Literary Representation* views Gandhi's attitude towards women's participation in the freedom movement at three levels. She points out that these three levels were often contradictory in themselves:

> Women who bore the responsibility of a family such as the care of children and the aged were to fulfill only their primary duties which were not to be given up for the sake of the national movement. Yet a second group included women from whom he hoped for a sacrifice of the pleasure of housekeeping and childbearing. If already married, these women were expected to remain celibate for the sake of the national movement. Thirdly, workers who had dedicated themselves entirely to the struggle for independence were expected to stay single in clear pursuit of their target.[5]

From Sethi's observations it can be surmised that although the national movement had the scope to introduce new angles to women's lives by offering them greater independence within both domestic and public spheres, it did little to alter the private domain of women.

The inception of third wave of feminism in India is usually taken as a phenomenon of the 1970s. With the third wave, even as the activism of the first and

second wave to improve the lot of women continued, significant efforts at theorizing Indian Feminism also took shape. Flavia Agnes, an activist and writer discusses the active phase and theoretical perspective in the article, "Women's Movement within a Secular Framework - Redefining the Agenda." According to her, the autonomous women's movement revolved mainly around the issue of rape and bride burning. To attract attention to the issues, women walked the streets in protest marches shouting slogans. This bore fruit and resulted in the establishment of counselling centres and support services. And it was heartening that women from both lower and middle strata approached the centres for help in a crisis situation. These challenged the traditional and conservative role of women as subordinate partners within domestic and social relationships. As the movement received wide media publicity, the state was forced to respond. Women's issues were placed on the agenda of state sponsored developmental schemes, social work programmes and sociological research. The government set up anti-dowry police cells to help victims of domestic violence. There were also legislative reforms although the inadequately formulated laws did not have the desired effect. Several community organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) addressed economic issues ushering in the movement of 'women's empowerment' in the place of 'women's welfare.' Flavia Agnes rightly concludes that although they did not either directly challenge the subordinate role of women within marriage or address `personal' issues like domestic violence, they indirectly helped in the empowerment of women through developmental work. The autonomous women's movement, which brought within its liberal framework issues concerning dalits, tribals and landless labourers focusing on providing relief to the victims of communal riots, be it the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984, be it the Bhiwandi riot in then Bombay in 1984, worked with the understanding that gender lines can be drawn up clearly and sharply in a patriarchal

society and within these parameters sexual assault and domestic violence affect women equally across class, culture and religious barriers.

But, unfortunately for women, as it happened in the first and the second women's movement, even in the third, women's issues got subsumed in other issues. Mythical symbols of *Kali* and *Shakti* started being used to refer to women's new-found power. In a predominantly Hindu nation like India, such images percolated into the women's ideology almost naturally although they were not reflective of the strains of a pluralistic society existing in India. That is why, at the beginning stage, the symbols were not conscious efforts at popularizing Hindu Ideology, but almost unconscious acceptance of popular and powerful mythical symbols and hence no conscious efforts were made to replace them with more secular images. But unfortunately, the symbols lost their relevance of empowerment when some women activists started using them as signs of opposition against select parties. This was a big blow to the paradigm that strove to work towards the welfare of women, cutting across differences in communities. This also skewed women's attempts at censoring obscene projections of women in media and enforcement of Uniform Civil Code, as the movement, now in the grips of fundamentalists or fundamentalism went against the very concept of human rights. As far as opposition to obscenity was concerned, the movement started censuring whatever the fundamentalists viewed as objectionable. When it comes to the question of Uniform Civil Code, instead of being beneficial to the women of minority communities, it went against them, resulting in what might be termed double jeopardy. While pointing out that the Hindu Family Code had any number of stipulations that went against the welfare of women, yet went unnoticed as such, Flavia Agnes concludes that with the demand for Uniform Civil Code, the fear that Uniform Civil Code may go against their cultural identity, made things worse for the women of the minority communities who were

already bound by archaic and sexist laws. Thus the movement which started with the earnest effort to help women with secularism as the agenda got entwined with communal forces.

At no point of time have women been able to separate women's issues from external political and communal realities. While this is perhaps true of all movements, what is disturbing in the case of women's movement is the fact that the involvement has gone against the very cause of women's welfare surreptitiously, with the majority of women themselves not being aware of the repercussions. Thus the struggle of feminism continues and its most notable features can be summarized as:

i. Questioning patriarchal power structures of society. Patriarchy refers to those systems – political, material and imaginative – which invest power in men, and marginalize women. For example, a constructed order of the world in which a male is shown as superior is accepted as normal or true.

ii. Discovering the achievements of women even in their traditional roles as mothers and wives.

iii. Demanding importance for women in their activities of food production, child bearing and nurture. This is to question the stance that considers the work of men productive and privileges their work over the work of women thereby giving no importance to the output of women in the economic set-up.

iv. Defying the cultural constructs of gender and the stereotypical images imposed on women.

v. Proving that what is cultural is not natural and what is cultural is inimical towards women.

vi. Showing that women are caught in two extremities of images, i.e. being angels or harlots, a state that disallows women their right to their natural selves.

vii. Claiming that the personal is the political with the argument that the kitchen and the bedroom are as potent as the voting booths in a political set-up.

viii. Recognizing women's problems as social problems having their roots in the very system and not merely in individuals.

ix. Critiquing writings which picture women as helpless, emotional and irrational beings.

x. Refuting the commonly held view of women as objects of pleasure.

xi. Challenging the phallocentric view of man as the 'subject' and woman as the 'other'.

xii. Searching for wholeness and discovering the soul.

xiii. Criticizing the subordination, subjugation and confinement of women in the guise of sublimation.

xiv. Attempting to restructure society.

xv. Critiquing myths which form the basis of many erroneous beliefs.

xvi. Highlighting the need for women to come together as communities of women bound by the concept of sisterhood.

It is worth noting that feminism, in certain critical debates, is now considered a concept that has outlived its relevance. The term 'Post-feminism' highlights this stance. But if we take a look at even the most basic concepts of feminism, we realize that among not only men, but also women, there is neither an understanding nor an awareness of concepts like 'selfhood' and 'autonomy'. While there is a higher level of willingness, even among the illiterates, to educate the girl-child and to ensure that a woman is financially secure, the feminist thrust in showing gender as a cultural construct has had lower and slower rate of

acceptance even among the literates. While the more active approach of claiming equal share in property, equal pay in job and opposing social evils like dowry, rape, female infanticide, and foeticide has had public approval and support, opposition to the idea of women being cultural ambassadors of India has led to public outcry. While even the radical approach that claims right to abortion as opposed to some religious preaching and traditional beliefs has had staunch votaries, women's right over their own sexuality has not been tolerated. The reality of the situation is such that the problem of a working–class woman who is the victim of wife–battering at the hands of an alcoholic husband calling for constitutional amendment has greater chances of solution than the predicament of an educated woman whose social standing leads to ego clashes with her husband. The reality is an indicator to the truth that feminists are far from attaining their goal as far as *the personal* is concerned and hence their struggle has to continue albeit on a different battle field. That is why, as pointed out by Sara Mills, even in the post-feminist or Third Wave feminist movement, the phrase 'the personal is political' still resonates because mainstream political activity hasn't seemed to concern itself with matters such as child care, domestic violence etc. which it considers private. On the other hand, many feminists have come to view mainstream political activity such as voting, politics etc. as ineffective in changing the real problems in the lives of women. They point out that problems which many women once considered to be their concern or even their fault have come to be seen as problems which are structural and therefore political, rather than simply individual matters to be negotiated with partners and families. This also shows that social or political participation of women has to start with the private self.

Personal or political, if feminism is viewed as that world–view which tries to understand the world from an alternate angle that is not phallocentric, the fairer sex emerges as a large global community which shares common compulsions overriding

barriers. Empowerment, in such a context, can vary from individual assertion to collective resistance, from the private to the public. If women activists have concentrated on women's political rights, women writers have focused on women's private worlds. Women writers writing from what many critics have termed *the inner courtyard* of women are social reformers who pose gender as a social and not private problem. At the basis of this social problem is the debilitating influence of cultures moulded by myths.

## THE CONCEPT OF MYTHS

Julian D. Bonn defines myth as an anonymous tale emerging from the traditional beliefs of a culture or social unit. He also describes mythological criticism as an approach to literature which seeks to identify what in a work creates deep and universal responses in readers by paying close attention to the hopes, fears and expectations of entire cultures. Mythological critics, sometimes called archetypal critics look for underlying , recurrent patterns in literature that reveal universal meanings and basic human experiences for readers, regardless of when and where they live. These critics attempt to explain how archetypes, (the characters, images and themes that symbolically embody universal meanings and experiences) are embodied in literary works in order to make larger connections that explain a particular work's lasting appeal.

Interest in myths as a subject of study in literature is a Twentieth Century phenomenon. It is an offshoot of anthropological research of human behaviour by pioneers like James G. Frazer and Northrop Frye which can be understood in the framework of the linguistic-structuralistic analysis of Claude Lévi-Strauss.

The basic assumption of anthropology is that social reality is not objectively given, but is socially constructed. Anthropology bases this assumption in the principle of

the mythological framework of archetypal criticism. It is through the lens of this critical framework that one can understand the mythology that lies behind the ideology in which society indoctrinates its subjects. According to Strauss, an explanation of how the structure came to be what it is and what its nearest relatives are can be understood only when we study structures as parts of systems. When we study structures as parts of systems, we see myths as the determining agency in the social construction of the past, present, and future. Literary critics agree with Strauss about the invisible influence of myths over the collective unconsciousness of a group. In addition, however, they attribute to myths the universal value of offering a shared world view. Myth is viewed as human experience tending to verbalise itself. Gulshan Rai quotes Philip Wheelwright's definition of myth in his essay 'Myth in Literary Criticism' as, "Myth is the expression of a profound sense of togetherness – a togetherness not merely upon the place of the intellect – but a togetherness of feelings of action and of wholeness of living". [6] Rai quotes March Schorer's references to myth as, "... fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend." [7]

As can be evinced in these observations myths are viewed as that desirable influence that can bring back to collective memory fading values, ideals and ideologies, cherished in ancient times. Their employment in creative works gives to the reader the hope that the magic can work again and the utopian model will once again come into existence.

It is but natural for every nation to have its faith in the mythical heroes and to believe in their innate goodness. Writers have drawn richly from myths, fables and

folktales not to condemn them, but to recapture their undying relevance and human value. There is no denying the fact that literature would be poorer if not for these exercises. Indian literature has drawn richly from myths from time immemorial. The various versions of *the Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata* bear testimony to this. Myths are taken from the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* too. This kind of employment of myth in literature is not new. Myth, in such an instance, is a tool employed to solve material and moral problems or to highlight cultural heritage and tradition. Myth, in such cases, turns out to be an idealized dream of the good triumphing over the evil, a fulfillment of wish. However, in the inner worlds of women another arm of myths comes into play. It is through the mythical model of Roland Barthes that we can see that the erroneous projections of women are unambiguously connected to the concept of myth. Although normally myths are considered stories that are passed on from generation to generation involving religion, broader connotations of myths show them as stories that attempt to explain how the world was created or why the world is the way it is. In other words myths needn't necessarily mean stories about superhuman beings of earlier ages. They can also mean false representations, erroneous beliefs, and fictitious, unproven, illusory things made to seem real. This is the idea Rolland Barthes discusses in his path-breaking work *Mythologies*. Barthes posits myths as ideology or false consciousness parading and being accepted as natural. The Semiotic Theory of Barthes conceptualizes myths as ideological practices. Barthes writes, "In short, in the account given of our contemporary circumstances, I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of what-goes-without-saying, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there." [8] Barthes is unequivocal in his avowal that myth is a mode of signification. The distinction among the signifier, signified, and the sign has capital importance for a study of myth as semiological schema. Myth is read as a

factual system whereas it is a semiological system. Myth transforms history into nature. Myth is experienced as innocent not because its intentions are hidden but because they are naturalized.

The process of naturalization can be studied through C. G. Jung's analysis of the *collective unconscious* without losing sight of two facts: The anthropological origins of archetypal criticism go back by over thirty years from Jung's time to *The Golden Bough* by James G. Frazer who in this work dealt with cultural mythologies, and the popularity of archetypal criticism in the 1960s and 70s is credited to the work of the Canadian critic Northrop Frye. The word 'archetype' from the Latin 'archetypum' means *original form or imprint*. According to the psychological model of Jung, the archetypes originate in the *Collective Unconscious*, the deepest layer of the collective psyche of mankind. The *Collective Unconscious* can be described as a repository for all of mankind's experience and knowledge over many eons. This is the universal source of all mythic, symbolic and dream representations. As long as an archetype remains unconscious, that is unknown to ego-consciousness, its meaning cannot be understood. Every one of us inherits specific archetypal behaviour patterns handed down to us through the generations. Unconscious patterns get worse with every generation. Jung defines this negative accumulation as the ancestral shadow, a psychological backlog that could erupt anytime given the right environment or psychic trigger.

Many of us operate within an inherited archetypal family structure and don't realize it. Unconscious complexes or 'parts' within us can engulf the ego and take over. Power trips, avarice, over-possessiveness, jealousy, inflated pride, depression, abusive anger and ungrounded idealism all have an archetypal pattern working at the core. If one is in the grip of an archetypal pattern, it is very hard to perceive it.

One of the main keys to unlocking unconscious attachment to a specific archetypal pattern is objective awareness. Understanding how we relate and interact with these 'parts' is the beginning of real soul growth. To understand an archetype takes time, patience, humility and a willingness to explore and unlock the symbolic meaning behind it. Our conscious objective awareness of these patterns can make a huge difference in our life. If psychiatrists attempt to do this 'unlocking' through therapy, creative writers try to achieve the desired end through their writing.

But objective awareness is not easy to achieve. We are very often unaware of illogical leanings in our own selves. Our unconscious acceptance of illogical ideas can be illustrated from a simple example. One of the fallacies in logical reasoning can be seen in an exchange of the following kind:

"The Bible is infallible as it is the word of God."

"How do you know that it is, in fact, the word of God?"

"Why? It says so in the Bible."

The above cited exchange is a typical example of Circular Reasoning Fallacy. In such an instance, in fact, there is no argument at all and it is a non-sequitur. Yet, when uttered by an authoritative voice and repeated over and over again, the claim may sound authentic and a mind that is not highly logical may accept the same, uncritically. Even when there is an element of doubt, such a doubt may immediately be followed by a sense of guilt and fear of speaking against a well-established idea and of being iconoclastic. As a result, there could be mass following of the fallacious conclusion arrived at in the argument. In case the fear is overcome and this temerity results in the criticism of the illogical argument, such an act might be viewed as impious or sacrilegious. It will not be understood that it is not blasphemy, but sincere desire to free the mind from bias that

would make pragmatic people speak their mind out, in opposition to the faulty conclusion, irrespective of their religious beliefs and sentiments.

Likewise, in the case of myths, especially those revolving around women, there is many a fallacy that is carried forth by the 'collective unconscious' of a society. There are instances of circular reasoning fallacies in arguments which claim women to be inferior to men. If counter argued, sacred texts are cited as proof of the 'fact'. In the Indian scenario, it is now a cliché to say that *Manusmrithi* is one such text denigrating the status of women. Here, my critique is not of *Manusmrithi* itself, but of its interpretations. I do so because the text itself, which is not read in the original, should not be critiqued. However, its defense by its proponents is illogical. When Manu's dictate that no woman is worthy of freedom is questioned by thinkers and scholars, answers go off at a tangent with claims that *Manusmrithi* is not the views of one man, but a learned, assimilated treatise. The irony is that whether it is the pronouncement of a single man or a number of men, the general understanding of *Manusmrithi* is totally and absurdly against self-respecting women. Also, a few words of deference regarding women which can be found in *Manusmrithi* are reserved for public platforms and not practised in private lives. It is ironic that myth and reality which ought to be examples of binary oppositions, in many instances, cease to be so and myth is erroneously viewed as reality. The description of myth in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* explains this paradox:

> Myth fulfils in primitive culture an indispensable function, it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality, it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man; myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization, it is not an intellectual explanation or

an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic character of primitive faith and moral wisdom. [9]

Two things are clear from this – the worlds of myth and reality are seamless and it is easy to move from one to another and one may do so without even realizing the transgression. Very often it is also true that the problem lies not with myths themselves but in their interpretations.

That is why writers choose to reread and rewrite myths coming up with their own interpretations. Re-reading myths has the agenda that intends to show the debilitating influence of myths. M. Sarat Babu observes, "Myths, legends and folk forms function as a kind of cultural anesthesia and they have been used for introducing and eliminating, in our racial unconscious, cultural pathogens such as caste and gender distinctions and religious fanaticism."[10] This is why, rereading myths and deconstructing what has been hitherto accepted as reality is a new and healthy practice. This creative impulse, in a way is a corollary to the interest shown by critics, in the fields of both literature and anthropology, in studying myths and their impact on human psyche.

Meenakshi Mukherjee in her article 'Myth as Technique' in the book *The Twice Born Fiction* discusses at length the use of myths by contemporary Indian writers. She remarks that there are instances where myths are not consciously used techniques but unconscious operations in novels. She refers to archetypes of Sita, earth-mother, Radha-Krishna and Sita-Rama which appear time and again not necessarily because the authors are trying to give a mythical colouring to their work, but because these are part of our cultural pattern, our ideals of aspirations that may or may not have any basis in the actual conduct of real human beings. After establishing this unconscious influence of myths she proceeds to discuss two methods - digressional and structural - as employed by

contemporary writers. Explaining the digressional method as stories within a story to drive home a point, Mukherjee cites Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* as an example of this. In this device writers weave in myths, legends and rituals to make their plot mythical. Mukherjee points out that this device has its bearing in *Panchatantra, the Vishnu Purana* and other Sanskrit narrative treatises and *the Mahabharata* and *the Ramayana.* In the structural device the use of myth is structured, i.e. relevant to the total concept of the plot, and not incidental. Mukherjee, refers to R. K. Narayan's *The Man-eater of Malgudi* as an example of structural myth which has mythical design of order, dislocation of order and restoration of order, reminiscent of the *puranic* conflict between *sura* (the divine) and *asura* (the demon). Mukherjee terms the device structural because in this method myth is relevant to the total concept of the plot, and not incidental. Mukherjee expostulates that in yet another device myths operate as neither a part of a digressional technique nor a central structural device, but as mythical parallels to illuminate only incidentally certain situations or characters.

While Meenakshi Mukherji's observations on myths as techniques are significant, they do not highlight women writers' approach to myths. However, her allusions to Mulk Raj Anand's *The Old Woman and the Cow* show that a few male writers too, although in a sporadic manner, have demythologized the gendered mythical stance. Mukherjee writes, "… but Anand's negative use of myth is worth special mention because this text is unique among Indian novels in rejecting rather than extolling the time honoured womanly virtues of patience and submission."[11] The word 'unique' indicates that not many male writers have a claim in this sphere. It also highlights the point that the ways in which male and female writers have employed myths have been fraternal.

The broad frame of unconscious influences of myths, digressional, and structural devices of myths, and mythical parallels are apparent in women's writings too. But there are underlying differences in the treatment. For instance, even when the device is digressional, myths are woven into the main story-line or plot to make way for thought provoking discourses. In a few instances women writers go one step further and reread myths so as to release the women archetypes from the male determinants of desirable and undesirable, ideal and unacceptable characteristics. By doing this they envisage a new dynamic social order, according to the female perception of a woman's self. Women writers have shown that myths are, to use Louis Althusser's term, part of Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) which functions invisibly. ISA is constituted by family, religion, community, press and mass media and operates through consent and consensus. It is seemingly less dangerous than the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) which works by force having police, penal system and army as its agents. But in reality ISA can be more damaging than RSA because the former reigns supreme in the collective unconscious and hence remains elusive and goes unopposed. When we understand how ISA functions, we can unravel the mystery behind women accepting their inferior position for thousands of years despite their number being the same as that of men. The working of ideology is subtle. It doesn't take recourse to violence. Yet, through a set of ideas it controls the mind and thereby the body while giving the illusion of autonomy. Althusser points out the power of ideology as a set of ideas, beliefs and myths in terms of which men and women relate themselves to their traditions of existence in an imaginary way. *Ideos,* a Greek word, is the root of 'ideology' and it is true that we are always in need of ideas in terms of which society operates. No society can function without ideology. But when an ideology in its function of subject formation, which is the process of constituting concrete

individuals into human subjects with assigned roles, is disparaging towards one set, it ought to be questioned.

The aim of women writers is to examine the power of images, myths, cultural ideals and linguistic categories over society in general and women's lives in particular. Jasbir Jain avers, "Supposedly neutral, myth and history are not neutral. They are hegemonic structures and have gender dimensions. Myth marginalizes women, history excludes them."[12] In other words, it is in the site of representation that the role played by myths features on the canvas of women writers. The writers 'de-mythologize' and're-mythologize' representations hitherto made to appear real through popular myths. Thus the strategy of women writers is three-pronged:

- Questioning and deconstructing popular images of women by projecting them as not the natural choices of women, but images imposed on women.
- Weaving mythical stories within the main plot and deriving new inferences.
- Taking a female archetypal figure as the protagonist of a short story or a novel and approaching the central character through a psycho-analytical, essentially feminist angle. Here, writers not only reread but also rewrite myths.

This strategy of women writers can be comprehended in the framework of archetypal criticism, which is also known as totemic, mythological or ritualistic criticism. It is based on minute textual analysis because the critic has to demonstrate some basic cultural pattern of great import and appeal to humanity in a work of literature. It is a branch of psychological criticism which deals with the unconscious, not of the writer or of his imagined characters, but of the human race. The psychoanalytical device is also indicative of the fact that the thematic concerns of Indian novels have shifted from the social to the individual or personal.

Thus, women writers problematise myths and shake the very basis of the belief system that goes hand in hand with them. The strategy shows that the belief system, a natural corollary to myths, is fundamentally flawed and has been both invidiously and insidiously affecting the status of women in society over centuries. The assumption is foregrounded on the argument that the myth-makers of the past have been male writers and have imposed on women mythical dimensions that patriarchy considers desirable. This has steadily circumscribed the choices for women, imprisoning them in the culture of silence.

It is this feminist agenda that I would like to study for twin–purposes. First and foremost, the act of rereading and rewriting myths is a highly creative endeavour which finds new patterns within the set structure. This creative exercise is more challenging than a total free play of imagination. It is comparable with innovations in classical art forms wherein an artiste explores new possibilities even as she remains faithful to the set pattern. Secondly, it is a fearless approach of voicing what comes out as true to the writer. This temerity is exceptional as the writers who question what has been fossilized as sacrosanct run the risk of being labelled iconoclastic. The opposition can come from not only men but also women. In Sudhir Kakhar's view, as quoted by Ranjana Harish, even bedtime stories about mythological characters like Sita and Savitri carry, "seeds of deep rooted acculturation for Indian girls."[13]

Notwithstanding the opposition from all quarters, women writers have spoken out and have voiced the truth. The growth can be studied and understood through two different angles. *Feminine Critique* edited by Shanta Serbjeet Singh and Jyothi Sabharval refers to Amrita Pritam's stand on this evolution. Pritam uses the analogy of Kunti, as the mother of Karna and Pandavas, and women as writers. She equates the stifled cries of

Kunti at the time of the birth of the illegitimate son Karna with the silence of women writers over issues unacceptable to society. However, when the writing is as acceptable as the birth of the legitimate sons, the Pandavas, the screams are loud. But there comes a stage in the lives of women writers, as it did in the life of Kunti when she revealed the truth of the birth of Karna, when the women writers are no longer afraid of expressing the truth. This evolution in writing is tantamount to the spiritual evolution in the life of Kunti.

Another important point to reckon with is that epic stories do not always project women as powerless. Images of "Shakti" or "Kali" or "Mother Goddess" are as much prevalent as those of Sita and Savitri. However, such images too can be equally debilitating in the area of women's welfare. Vina Mazumdhar, as quoted by Jain, has an interesting take on this. She concludes that the view of woman as "shakti" upsets the belief in passive femininity. However, it doesn't tilt the scale in favour of women because, "Women were oppressed not because they were considered inferior but because they were considered powerful. It was this 'Shakti' which needed to be controlled. She was seen as the 'other' which represented, the impulsive and irrational and posed a threat to masculine virtue and power."[14]

Vrinda Nabar's reference to Kali is an indicator to the multiplicity of view points. The tongue stuck out Kali, for Nabar, is not the symbol of awe but guilt and shame contained in the fact that she had inadvertently stepped on Siva, her God and the only force in the universe that could have stopped her onslaught not as God or strength but as her husband.

Her references to Lakshman Rekha are:

> However, it is also crucial to realize that the Lakshman-rekha could in fact be viewed as a form of constraint, a line which Sita, as woman, had no right to cross over. It was a boundary drawn by a male, who had been deputed by another male to guard Sita, the female. When Sita failed to obey the male dictate and crossed the line, she saw why it was necessary to remain confined to where the male world wanted her to stay.[15]

Nabar continues to reread Sita's Agni Pariksha as:

> It is revealing enough that, throughout Indian history Sita's agni-pariksa has been glorified rather than condemned. What is even worse, however, is that some time later Rama, horrified to learn that his kingdom is abuzz with lurid stories of Sita's conduct in Lanka, actually feels obliged, as an ideal king, to exile her to the forest even though she is pregnant. Moreover, this is an act for which he has been immortalized in the Indian consciousness as a role-model for all those in power – a ruler who placed the ethics of public life above personal gratification.[16]

Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan, who has translated Sara Joseph's retelling of the *Ramayana* points out that by selecting different episodes from the *Ramayana* and not treating it as a continuous story, Sara Joseph diffuses the emphasis on Raman, the hero, and focuses on certain characters, especially women characters, who have been marginalized and not given enough attention and importance in the original. Sita, Manthara, Soorpanakha and Sambooka's daughter are the protagonists of the four key stories. Thus, the androcentric version of Valmiki finds an alternative. The readings and interpretations differ not in the plot and setting, but in the portrayal of characters. For example, 'Black Holes' deals with Manthara as a typical subaltern, a victim of power and intrigue. The spurned

Soorpanakha is a symbol of age-old male suspicion of female sexuality. In 'Mother Clan' Soorpanakha's breasts grow into a metaphor for womanhood and motherhood as it does in Mahasveta Devi's story 'Stanadayini'. In 'What is Not in the Story' Joseph shows Rama as guilty of making Sambooka's and his own children fatherless.

If we move away from Sita-Savitri-Shakti triad and take a look at a few other archetypes of an entirely different range, a new type of design comes into our understanding. In the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Harivamsa*, Krishna, the grandest god of the Hindu pantheon, is extolled as the beloved of Radha and the milk-maidens of Gokul. Secular and devotional poetry alike depict Krishna as the hero and Radha as his lady love and heroine. They signify the archetypal pairs - *nayaka and nayika* (hero and heroine), *paramatma* (absolute soul) and *jivatma* (individual soul) where the *jivatma* constantly yearns to unite with the *paramatma* bringing to the forefront *sringara* (love) and bhakthi (religious devotion), two sentiments of special merit in Indian culture. This binding of the sacred and the profane is truly singular to the Indian ethos. Radha, Mira, Akkamahadevi and Andal are all glorified for their spiritual merging with their beloved lords. Feministic readings too recognize in these women incomparable courage to defy patriarchy and go against the institution of marriage upholding individualism. But Sakuntala Narasimhan rightly questions, "Would these women have had the same awed acceptance if they had not manifested what was seen as 'divine' intervention in their support? Was it perhaps that superhuman displays which helped these women transcend gender handicaps that humdrum women faced? One wonders. Where once women had to work miracles to win acceptance as worthy of note, today the modern equivalent is, perhaps, good looks and glamour which play the same part in a woman's assessment." [17]

Debilitating mythic dimensions are not limited to mythologies alone. Models of womanly conduct are set out for women in folk stories, legends and songs preserved from the past. Moreover, not only literature but other art forms also contribute towards the sculpting of women's images on male dictates or male desires. Such a trend is seen mostly in the theorization and depiction of love based on the intensity of love, depth of love, expression of love, maturity of age, experience and temperament into eight types or the *ashtanayikas (eight heroines)*. Theories of dance, for example, consist of analyses of love situations centered on the archetypal heroine - one of the *ashtanayikas*. In painting, the expectant beloved waiting for the lover is often depicted in a lush bower of flowering plants and creepers *(vasakasajja)* while the dejected or over-anxious one is depicted suffering from the fire of passion *(virahagni)* and of separation. Some *nayikas* are also shown as deceived *(khandita)* and rebuked *(manini)* The most powerful of them all is the one who controls her lover *(svadhinaopatika)* with her beauty, charm and wit. These reflections bring into focus the aesthetics of art forms. But feminists have viewed the depictions in terms of women's dignity. B. N. Sumithra Bai's response to these depictions, referred to by Tejaswini Niranjana and Simanthini Niranjana, highlights the patriarchal power structure that depicts women as commodities of pleasure and objects to satisfy the sexual urge of men.

Another main stream of thought while discussing the influence of myths has been the way myths have construed female sexuality. It is in this context that the image of motherhood comes into foreplay because the freedom that the feminists seek is in not only the recognition of sexuality but also the resistance to stereotypical constructs of motherhood. Indian tradition is formatted on scriptures and they privilege family. The family subordinates women and imprisons them in the straight jacket of code of conduct. Code of conduct or morality is differentially defined for men and women. All strictures

are aimed at only women. A woman has no choice but to oscillate between being a dutiful wife or a loving mother. In both these roles she is expected to be the very epitome of perfection and selflessness. Jasbir Jain explicates the situation without mincing words:

> ...the concept of Dharma and the ritual practice it evokes along with the socio-moral approval it conveys, excludes a woman not merely from power structures and social constructs but also from her own body, the idea of a self as well as her sexuality. Also whether decorated and exploited or deprived and constrained, it is the female body which remains the still point... [18]

Through different discourses, writers have shown that mother goddess is a sign of ability to generate and nurture life. Yet outside folklore her power is often subverted or leashed by subordination to a male deity. That is why quite often devious methods of subversion have been contemplated by women to overcome their state of powerlessness. Rumina Sethi comes up with one such suggestion while talking about motherhood. While acknowledging that the national agendas of India through the nineteenth century reproduced a complete epistemology where woman as prakriti or the regenerating force was required to have the innate values of motherhood, patience and endurance, Sethi argues that women can exploit this gendered role by 'politicization of motherhood' and counter 'marginality with some form of resistance'. This is done with the understanding that patriarchal set-up fortified by the Dharma Shastras, Smritis and Puranas seldom allows the existence of any alternative forms of politicization among women. However, Sethi argues, the traditional gendered roles need not always be stultifying. Women overwhelmed and ghettoized by the macro political discourse of nationalism which remained fixed on the symbology of motherhood so that women entered public life primarily to play maternal roles, still had room for effective politicization. Sethi proposes

that women negotiate with governments in their essentially apolitical existence. The government will be forced to listen to women because they cannot be dangerous like the militant left or labour organizations. Sethi's contention is that the apolitical nature of motherhood will give them the scope to politicize motherhood. This is Sethi's alternative to the problem of motherhood which Adrienne Riche, an early proponent of maternalism, refers to as the capacity of a woman not only to reproduce, beget and nourish human life, but also more significantly as an institution that ghettoizes and degrades female potentialities so that the mother remains subordinated to male control. Sethi concludes that it is important to construct a theory of motherhood that is free of myths of a blissful state of being or tease out examples from history where the joys of motherhood have been interrogated. For Sethi, another possibility of egalitarianism is when 'mothering' becomes a shared responsibility. Although 'motherhood' is the unique difference of women from men, 'mothering' is equally available to both. Sethi sees motherhood as a site of subversion in defeating the state's own gender ideology.

Taking the site of debate to Islam, Sara Abubakar cites the 6,100 and odd verses in the 114 chapters of *the Quran* and remarks that definite interpretation is available for around 300 verses only. The interpretations of the remaining verses differ from sect to sect. Yet, ironically, when it comes to the question of women's exploitation, all sects have consensus. Remarking that atrocities against women in the times of Mohammad Paigambar were extreme in nature, Abubakar contends that the protective measures advised by Paigambar then, although liberating for that time, go against the freedom of women in the present times.

Sanjay Kaptan and V. P. Subramanian in their full-fledged work on images of women bring under their scanner religions of different worlds to show how from the

ancient through the medieval to the modern, tradition has undermined the importance of women. They argue that in the Classical, Hebraic and Christian tradition women occupied lower shelf in the evolutionary scale. Plato ascribed it to the notion of women being the second born – the idea that there was an initial creation and those who proved inadequate or cowardly were reborn as women. The Old Testamount considers woman an afterthought. Adam was in need of companion despite the creation of different animals. So from the rib of Adam, Eve was made, introducing the idea of 'woman' from 'man'. Genesis has it that the sons of God saw the daughters of men and found them fair, but the fact remained that men were divine and women only human with the exception of two special positions of Virgin Mary and Mother Mary. Kaptan and Subramanian continue their study with references to Hebraic tradition and state that Hebraic tradition has a crop of startling views. The Menaloth, a tractate of the Babylonian Talmud dealing with the ritual of the Temple, commends this prayer, "Blessed art thou who has not made me a woman."[19] The various books of the Talmud lump women with slaves and minions. The authors point out that since the Christian tradition grew out of the Hebraic, the same trend is seen in the Christian tradition too. The authors move on to talk about the mythical material of the pre-Christian tradition impinging freshly on the western imagination at the time of Renaissance which did nothing to imbalance the prejudices established as natural, up to the Middle Ages. The tales of classical mythology positively introduced new elements into the already unholy mixture. Renaissance men who pondered over the myths of the ancient world found they confirmed that not only were women vain and illogical, but they also, by all accounts, were unreliable, violent and prone to terrifying acts of vengeance. To Pandora, the first woman, are attributed all the woes of mankind. Pandora is a parallel figure to the temptress Eve, and the box she opens reflects the carnal knowledge of women and the immensity of evil it brought to men. The sort of devastation

she was blamed for was acted out on smaller stages by countless other mythological figures. Zeus is continually deceived by Goddesses such as Aphrodite, Thetis and, most of all, by Hera, his sister and wife, their marriage being a kind of permanent war. Helen of Troy, the cause of the Trojan War, is no less guilty of carnage. The writers concede that there are the Muses and the Graces as positive examples. But such collective images are readily offset by those other groups – always female – whose names have passed into the language as stereotypes: the Furies, the Gorgons, the Harpies, the Sirens. The monstrous Sirens and Harpies who devoured innocent travellers were but an extreme manifestation of the sexual magic by which individuals like Aphrodite, Hera, Calypso or Circe could ensnare any man. These were sexually mature women and as such were regarded as evil and destructive. Only virgins emerge as helpful in classical mythology. While Penelope wins the highest admiration for her chastity, Homer charges the ghost of Agamemnon to haunt Clytemnestra for her infidelity and her part in his murder. The authors conclude that unable to cope with any multiplicity of characteristics united in one female, men allotted to women one of two basic roles and the extra gloss of sexual depravity, with its attendant acts of savagery, betrayal and revenge. The authors conclude that the narrative patterns established then have shaped the literary forms of a more modern era. The authors remark that in India, Manu and Kautilya assigned such a low status to women that women were often grouped with dogs and chandalas representing the lowest caste. Stating that the problems of women are almost always in their relationship with men, the authors enumerate the dominant stereotype images of women in Indian media as:

i. Less competent human beings.

ii. The key to commercial success in this age of advertising.

iii. Instruments of exploitation by men.

A consumerist society puts woman on the pedestal as the glamourised sex object, her supreme purpose being providing titillation to the male dominated world. Women appear in magazine, fiction and in television drama and comedy as self deprecating, dependent, irrational, superstitious and over emotional entities. In advertisements especially, women are shown as either housewives whose interests are limited to domestic needs or else sexually allowing background which makes consumer goods more attractive by association.

The authors rightly point out that all this reinforces rather than reduces prejudices and stereotypes and justifies and perpetuates existing inequities. The attempt to live in a modern context by the value of a bygone age produces colossal tension and conflict. The values of the bygone age have led to the stultification of many a stereotype:

i. A woman's place is in the house.
ii. The most important and valuable asset of a woman is her physical beauty.
iii. A woman's energies and intellect must be directed towards finding the right man and in keeping him.
iv. A woman is dependent, coy, and submissive. She is masochistic in her indignities, humiliations and even physical violence inflicted on her.
v. The good woman is the traditional housewife, long suffering, pious and submissive; the modern woman who asserts herself and her independence is undesirable and can never bring happiness to anybody nor find happiness for herself.
vi. A woman is woman's worst enemy.
vii. The working woman is the undesirable exception who must be brought into the marriage fold and made to conform to social norms etc.

Critics and creative writers have objected to the blurring of the demarcation between fact and fiction. They have shown that myths are fiction, that too man-made fiction and what myths expostulate is far from reality. Rereading myths means rereading ideological representations and this exercise is taken up by women to create a lateral world of myths

which will be tomorrow's ideology. The feminist agenda of creative writers can be summarized in the words of Joan Rockwell, "The assumption here is that the fate of imaginary people when made known, that is when social interaction is related as fictional narrative, will have the power to mobilize public opinion, change the accepted values and norms, and force a change in social relations themselves."[20]

Women writers take recourse to subversive writing which focuses on unfair practices handed down to us because of archetypal patterns and absence of objective awareness. That is why the seeds of ideas present in the fictional world of women-writers are of paramount importance in the evolutionary process of impacting the popular unconsciousness of the future. Their output turns out to be as important as the work of intellectuals, philosophers and social reformers. Their effectiveness perhaps greater because, with a story, creative writers can avoid the usual opposition to a truth because the charm a story holds is irresistible and familiar hostility towards feminist writing can be circumvented. Hence creative writing has greater chances of success as far as the task of creating awareness is concerned. In this perspective, creative writing can be viewed as critical work, in a different genre although. Thus the critical idiom in the creative works of writers gains immense relevance in the field of social reform. If the critical thinkers and activists concentrate on 'what' has been denied to women and 'how' it can be claimed, creative writers go one step further in creating awareness as to 'why' this has been denied. If critical writings speak for women, creative works speak to women. Therefore, the latter can impact the collective unconsciousness of society to a greater extent, changing the unconscious to the conscious. The creative writers' approach can be deemed more relevant because common sense tells us that what is, in the first place, not introduced by logic, cannot be removed by logic.

Creative writing has significance in another aspect too. In view of the fact that the critical output in India in the field of feminism is not heavy, the creative field serves as the double-edged sword. The recent happenings in India have been regressive in nature as far as women are concerned and the notion of women as cultural ambassadors of society has cropped up once again powerfully and viciously. Mythical figures have been referred to repeatedly to remind women of their cultural roots. Hence, it is imperative that writers deal with the idea of 'imposed images' and 'conditioning of women' to create awareness among women themselves in particular and people in general, and raise questions about representations. The critical edge of re-reading myths aims at debunking these false notions.

It could be surmised that women as well as men are powerfully influenced by the exemplars of their culture. The patterns of women's lives, their expectations and ideals, and their orientation to social reality are handed down to them as if they are bequeathed unto them, whereas, in reality, they are systematic steps to deny women their autonomy. But women themselves do not understand the hidden agenda of subjugation in the guise of sublimation.

Hence, the strategy of women writers while tackling myths needs to be three-pronged. They have to question the deep-rooted practices and notions held sacred because of the influence of mythologies, create awareness about conditions imposed on women because of invisible forces acting in society and prove that the myth of a liberated woman is contrary to reality.

Thus, the writing, which, at the superficial level, seems to be by women and about women, moves on to the higher level of social criticism when it is viewed as writing with socialist concerns, which aims at politically setting right what is innately wrong. It brings

together the triad of the familial, social and political, envisaging a change for the better. Thus, what is often dismissed flippantly as domestic ideology of women writers is in reality both social and political.

**THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

- To juxtapose Shashi Deshpande and Vaidehi who belong to the same time and soil, but write in two different languages in the same genre of creative writing.
- To critique the creative works of Shashi Deshpande and Vaidehi as sites of feminist critical debate.
- To analyse the extended vision of humanism of the writers.
- To highlight the relevance of such works in the present time.
- To study their tool of rereading and rewriting myths as cultural criticism aiming at healthy social changes.
- To suggest measures that would ascribe to the writers greater prominence in the pedagogical circles.

A critique of the creative works of Shashi Deshpande and Vaidehi with a special focus on rewriting myths will follow the interpretative mode of research in analyzing, interpreting and evaluating the literary texts of the two writers. Within the broader framework of feminism, the tenets of archetypal criticism will be employed in order to understand the impact of myths in the world of women. This is done keeping in mind the fact that the texts of Deshpande and Vaidehi have, by and large, two-pronged feminist approach: they point out unreal expectations, conditions and images imposed on women as also the role of myths in impaling these into the human psyche.

The genesis of Deshpande and Vaidehi as writers marks that period in which women writers in India overtly started dealing with feminist concerns. While interpreting individual texts of the writers and responding to them, my attempt will be to trace the feminist thought. While analyzing their works, my primary aim is to show their works as reflective of the critical perspectives of their time. When the critical edge of creative works of women writers is examined, the texts surface as the potent site of critical debates.

The prowess of Shashi Deshpande and Vaidehi lies in their ability to throw light on the private world of women. They do so because they understand the importance of the private world of women and the need for reformulations in that world. They do so also with the understanding that economic independence does not always liberate women from the constricting ideology of the private world. Thus the creative works of these two writers definitely come under the category of 'fiction of ideas' even as they continue to remain under the label of 'domestic ideology'. The two writers are brought under the same canvas as the central preoccupation of both has been feminist concerns. This is done despite the knowledge that neither of them would like to be tagged with the feminist label. But consciously or unconsciously almost every piece of writing of both the writers concerns itself with women's welfare and questions the patriarchal power structures of society. In projecting women, their roles and positions with stark reality, Deshpande and Vaidehi act as *consciousness erasers* and *consciousness raisers* of society. While deconstructing popularly held notions, they bring under their scanner dominant ideologies.

The study, it is hoped, would initiate and sustain a dialogue on the narratives of Deshpande and Vaidehi which have centered on debunking popular ideologies and

questioning religious myths. Although the focus of both the writers is more on deconstructing popular ideologies than questioning religious myths, one cannot overlook the truth that there have been creditable attempts on the part of both the writers to question religious myths too. Both Deshpande and Vaidehi, while critiquing myths, also radically reread and reconstruct them. Hence, the study would also try and trace the bold attempts of the writers to reread and rewrite religious myths. However, one should not forget that in India every myth has various versions and hence when writers reread and rewrite them, on the one hand if the act can be viewed as radical, on the other, it can be taken as an extension of an already existing tradition of innovation, revision and interrogation.

As a feminist reader my primary questions remain as to how a text represents women, what it says about gender relations and how it defines sexual differences. However, in all fairness to both the writers, it should be acknowledged that women and women's world are not the sole concern of the two writers. Both have exhibited a wider world view and have shown significant insight into the male psyche. The research work will bring to focus this extended vision too. Undoubtedly the writers should be recognized for their movement towards humanism even as feminism remains as their underlying concern. Prima facie, it is in the world of all human beings that they are interested in, but they cannot forget that women constitute one half of that world.

## THE RATIONALE BEHIND THE CHOICE OF THE NOVELISTS

**Shashi Deshpande** is a well known name in the field of Indian literature. She was born as the second daughter of the renowned Kannada dramatist as well as a great Sanskrit scholar Sriranga in Dharwad in 1938 in Karnataka. She pursued her education in Dharwad, Bombay and Bangalore. She received degrees in Economics and Law. She was

a gold medalist too. After getting married, she shifted to Mumbai (Then Bombay). During her stay in Mumbai, she decided to pursue a course in Journalism. So, she got herself enrolled in the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Thereafter, she took up a job as a journalist for the magazine *Onlooker*. She worked there for a couple of months. While working for the magazine, she began writing and the first short story that she wrote got published in 1970. Her short stories headed their way to popular magazines like *Femina, Eve's Weekly* etc. Her maiden collection of short stories was published under the title *Legacy* in the year 1978. Her first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* was published in 1980. However, it was *That Long Silence* published in 1988 that brought her critical acclaim with the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990, Padma Shri Award in 2009, and Nanjangud Thirumalamba Award. Along with nine novels, she has also written four books for children, a number of short stories and several perceptive essays now available in a volume entitled *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays.*

The leanings of Deshpande as a writer are easily discernible in her interview with Gita Viswanath in which Deshpande reiterates her stand of not consciously writing feminist novels, and hopes to be recognised as a writer who has written on other issues like human relationships. She denies having an ideology chalked out for the framework, but concedes that her ideas will feature in her writings. Rejecting the idea that she writes about Brahmin, middle class people, Deshpande strongly avers that she writes about human beings. She further avers that for her, parent-child relationship and husband-wife relationship are two important issues of family ideology. She argues that her novels are not endorsements of marriage; on the contrary, she finds marriage to be a very difficult situation in which enormous demands are made on each other. Revealing that at no point of time she has started writing a novel with the full plot in mind, Deshpande admits that characters take on a life of their own. Concerning the metaphor of silence in her novels,

Deshpande declares that it is the outcome of her experience of having seen, met and lived with people who were silent about many things they could not talk about that led to the depiction of such silenced women. But it had no theoretical basis as at the time of writing her first novel, she had not read theories. Deshpande considers her narrative neither straightforward nor simple, but realistic as opposed to magic realism. Her narrative that depends heavily on the protagonist's memory, she feels, is highly complex. About the present generation of Indian writers in English, Deshpande's view is that they need to be original and not imitative. About the choice of English as the medium of expression, Deshpande doesn't mince words in criticising those who make language an issue. She mentions her confrontation with Kannada writer Byrappa and argues that if her writing cannot capture the essence of a rural setting and a rural woman's life, it is not a problem because the important question is that the people, a writer chooses to talk about, should be real. Although it is true that certain rituals, religious practices, terms and phrases which are very evocative of all our languages cannot be put in English, it is not a major problem. Ultimately, what the writer wants to write about should be the choice of the writer. About the exceptionable constructs of women in popular cinema and television, Deshpande is of the opinion that such images don't bother her too much because they are so artificial that most viewers, being sensible, would be able to see through the construct. Nevertheless, such portrayals do make her uneasy as she considers them unhealthy.

It would be interesting to study what the writer states her writing to be, what critics conclude her writing to be and the gap if any between these two sites.

**Vaidehi** is the pen name of Janaki Srinivasa Murthy. Born in 1945 and raised in Kundapura, in the Udupi district of Karnataka, she now lives in the town of Manipal. She published her first book of short stories *Mara Gida Balli* in 1979. She has since then established herself as a significant presence in Kannada literature with short fiction, one

novel, essays, children's plays and poems. She has two collections of poetry to her credit: *Bindu Bindige* (1990) and *Parijatha* (1999). Her work *Dana Dangura* is a collection of twelve plays for children. Her novel *Asprushyaru* is an award winning work. *Meju Matthu Badagi,* coming under the genre of *Lalitha Prabhandha,* comprises autobiographical writings. Her short story "Gulabi Talkies" has been made into a movie by the renowned director, Girish Kasaravalli and the movie has won a National Award. She has written the biographies of Sediyapu Krishna Bhat, B.V. Karanth and Saraswathi Bai Rajavade. Her columns are titled *Mallinathana Dhyana.* She has also attempted translation work. She has translated to Kannada Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya's *Indian Women's Struggle for Freedom* and Maithreyi Mukhyopadhyaya's *Silver Shackles.* She has also translated the lectures of Dr.Bhaskar Chandavarkar. English translations of her poems have appeared in various journals and anthologies, including *In Their Own Voice: The Penguin Anthology of Contemporary Indian Women Poets* and *Hot is the Moon* (published by SPARROW). It is noteworthy that her stories are translated to Marathi, Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Gujarathi, Hindi and English. Tejaswini Niranjana has edited an anthology titled *Gulabi Talkies and Other Stories,* published by Penguin Publications in which Twenty of Vaidehi's short stories are translated to English. Her daughter Nayana Kashyap has translated the novella *Jathre* as *The Temple Fair* into English. Her short story 'Akku' is converted into a tele-film. Bhagirathi Bai has presented one-man-show of the short story "Shakunthaleyondige Kaleda Aparahnha" in Hindi, Kannada and Assamese. 'Abha' and 'Sougandhiya Swagathagalu' too have been similarly experimented upon. She has received a number of awards, including the 'Dana Chintamani Attimabbe Prashasthi' (an award from the Karnataka State government in 1998) for her contribution to Kannada literature. In addition, Vaidehi has received the prestigious *Anupama, M. K. Indira,* and *Rajya Sahitya Akademi* awards. In recognition of

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her extensive contribution to Kannada Literature, *Shashwathi Trust* has conferred on her the *Sadhyodhitha Akademi Award.* To top it all, the Kendra Sahithya Akademi conferred on her its award for the year 2010.

The study, juxtaposing Shashi Deshpande and Vaidehi, would lead to interesting findings because of the very similarities and dissimilarities between these two creative writers. Both are women writers belonging to the soil of Karnataka and both have their creative works in the form of novels and short stories. Both are concerned with women's issues and adopt a subversive style while dealing with the patriarchal power structures of society. The popular mode of narrative of both is the stream of consciousness technique although the technique is more pronounced in the case of Deshpande. Both exhibit admirable sensitivity while dealing with the subaltern women of lower rungs, victims of exploitation in the name of caste, class and gender although Vaidehi has more works to her credit in this sphere. Both, however, are also concerned with the human subject per se. However, if Shashi Deshpande has chosen English as a vehicle of thought, Vaidehi has chosen Kannada, the regional language of Karnataka as her medium of expression. What would be interesting to study is the question whether the two writers who have so many premises in common, but write in different languages arrive at the same conclusions or not. The comparison, however, would be the natural outcome of the juxtaposition and not a strained attempt to arrive at forced comparisons and conclusions. The question is important in the light of the fact that the works of Deshpande and Vaidehi involve themselves with the critical and theoretical debates of the day. It would be fruitful to analyze the two writers' preoccupations and perceptions as also the alternatives they envisage.

## THE MATRIX

The Thesis is in six parts. The **Introductory Section** places Deshpande and Vaidehi in the context of Indian feminism and cultural criticism. It concurrently deals with the concept of myth and its implications. The concept of myth is dove-tailed into myth as false consciousness and myth as popular mythological stories. In the former, the focus is on the way in which the writers have deconstructed the popularly held erroneous ideas, and in the latter, it is the way in which the writers have reread and rewritten the mythological stories, that interest the research scholar. The two concepts of myths are inter-linked. It is the mythological stories, held as sacred, that are at the basis of many a false idea. Rewriting them is wrought with the risk of being termed iconoclastic. Yet, the writers have shown temerity to do so because of their genuine understanding of the falsity of the situation and its debilitating impact on the lives of women. The **Second chapter** deals with the critical interest that has already been generated by the writers under the heading *Works Problematised.* The literature review is taken up with the twin-purpose of getting an in-depth knowledge of writers and their works as well as proving that not enough attention has been paid to their attempts at rereading and rewriting myths. The literature review proves that the thrust of the research scholar is not redundant. To avoid repetition, the works which have been cited elsewhere in the thesis as support material or debatable substance have not been included in the chapter on literature review. The **Third chapter** is an extensive critique of the novels of Shashi Deshpande. However, the first six novels of Deshpande – *The Dark Holds No Terrors, If I Die Today, Come up and be Dead, Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence and The Binding Vine* have been taken as points of reference only as these novels have already generated substantial critical response and have been dealt with extensively by research scholars and critics. Deshpande's more recent novels – *A Matter of Time, Small Remedies and Moving on*

have been analysed in an in-depth manner as the volume of critical work on these later novels is not exhaustive. However, her latest novel *In the Country of Deceit* has not been dealt with. The **Fourth chapter** focuses on the short stories of Deshpande. The stories have been categorized according to their thematic concern and not chronologically. Deshpande's short stories are divided on the basis of the female experience that she foregrounds, popularly held myths that she debunks, the value of human relationships that she upholds, political and social situations that she satirises and the myths that she subverts and re-writes. This attempt is with the idea that thematic division is likely to be sustained and meaningful. The **Fifth chapter** will critique Vaidehi's creative work as well as her critical and autobiographical work from the research scholar's perspective. This is in view of the fact that in Vaidehi's case there is hardly any distinction in different genres of writing. In the critical field there is also the notion that what is called 'Lalitha Prabhandha' is as much creative as any other piece of creative writing. That is why some of her articles have been juxtaposed with her stories to show that neither the style nor the subject is different in the two. As Vaidehi has only one novel to her credit, it has been included in the same chapter. Her short stories have been viewed through the angle of different feminist stances. Whether it is the conscious choice of the writer or not, the writer does exhit definite strains of socio-semio-psycho-marxist feminism. notwithstanding the focus on caste system, urbanization and humanism. Likewise, the metaphoric pieces, though not many, have been singled out and discussed. The **Conclusion** focuses on the critical perspective of the works and their social relevance as deduced from the research work. The conclusion bears in mind the objectives of the research scholar and discusses the extent to which the research work has supported or deconstructed the hypothesis made in the introductory chapter. The conclusion also highlights the research scholar's original view point that is arrived at after the study. The

suggestions are made with the earnest hope that the research work will have its relevance in the larger framework outside the pedagogical set-up too.

The bibliographical details have two main divisions: Primary and Secondary Source. The secondary source is further divided into English and Kannada separately, followed by details of research dissertations/theses, talks and e-sources.

# NOTES

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# CHAPTER II

## Works Problematised

### Literature Review

Both men and women critics have responded to works by women writers in a prolific manner. In the critical debates spanning the last fifty years during which women writers stormed the scene of Indian literature, three strains are generally discernible: initial hostility, later acceptance and final appreciation. But acceptance and appreciation are of three kinds: grudging acceptance in order to be politically right, intellectual acceptance by those initiated into the dialectics of feminism and involved acceptance by those who have either witnessed or experienced the marginalization of women and hence can appreciate the world presented in the works of women writers. It is in the last category that we find more number of women than men and it is this ratio that points out that if a social change is to be envisaged, the literati has to liberate women's writing from the confines of being viewed as literature by women, of women and for women.

**SHASHI DESHPANDE**

There is no dearth of literature to be reviewed in the case of Shashi Deshpande. In fact, she is one of those writers who have ignited critical responses from both male and female critics. While collating the various responses to her works, I have begun with full-length studies and then moved on to individual essays. In the case of individual essays, my attempt has been to group them together according to the cohesiveness of the subject matter.

Jasbir Jain has a whole book dedicated to the works of Shashi Deshpande. Jain explains her engagement with Deshpande as the outcome of her angst at the easy and stereotypical manner in which research scholars have approached the writings of Deshpande. Her very first chapter has the title 'A Writer Who Happens to be a Woman.' This, of course, is to state at the very beginning that she doesn't compartmentalize Deshpande's works in the special category of women writers.

Trying to trace the tradition Deshpande might have inherited when she published her first collection of stories in 1978, Jain points out that though Deshpande admits to her affiliation to Jane Austen and other nineteenth century women's writing as well as regional writers' works, she is not vocal about her predecessors. Going back to Toru Dutt as being at the root of Indian women writers' tradition, Jain zeros in on Krupabai Sathianadhan's work as that which deserves special attention with reference to Deshpande. This she says keeping in mind Sathianadhan's protagonist who journeys towards self-awareness and individuation, although the social strictures and structures curb self-expressions.

Moving on to the impressive trio of Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Kamala Markandeya, Jain says that these three used English for their creative writing for the same reasons as those of Deshpande. The three were educated in English and were comfortable with the English language. Jain remarks that Anita Desai's references to lack of tradition in the use of English, its refugee status and Desai's preference for English echo Deshpande's views. While collating many a work on Deshpande, Jain objects to the idea that almost all of them have concentrated on the feminist aspect labelling Deshpande a 'woman' writer. Although Mrinalini Sebastian's work is not guilty of this aspect, it is imbalanced as not enough attention is paid to Deshpande amidst the extensive delineation

of post-colonial theories. However, Jain does concede that it is a significant contribution in the critical perspective of Deshpande's works.

In continuation of her critique of the existing critical work on Deshpande, Jain questions the term 'typically Indian' used with reference to Deshpande. She also objects to the trend of merging the character with the writer, which is done by many critics who conclude that the views of the character are those of the writer. Listing out the areas which haven't received enough attention by research scholars and critics, Jain enumerates realism in Deshpande's works, her references to her literary influences, her narrative modes and strategies, the theme of poetics of grief, her use of myth and her native concern as possible areas to be explored. Jain avers in the concluding part of the chapter that her attempt is to liberate Deshpande from the cult of feminist reading and interpretation.

The second chapter with the title 'Pieces of Puzzle' is on the concept of family as dealt with by Deshpande. Almost scientific in its delineations, the chapter notes that in different novels family relationships work through different paradigms of power and money; mother-daughter relationship, cause and effect and exclusion and resistance strategies, economic structures and middle-class aspirations and man-woman relationships and marriage. Jain also throws light on the family structures in the novels of Deshpande saying the family structures have a multiple base. There is biological relationship, relationship that has come into existence because of the exchange in marriage, within or outside the community etc. However, there is no reference to bigamy and the family is based on monogamous pattern. Deshpande shows the necessity to belong, to have roots and the possibility of the same roots being constricting too. On the one hand, if women need to be freed from these fetters, on the other, this freedom may mean the loss of some importance and power they enjoyed within the traditional structures of the family.

Comparing the family to pieces of puzzle, Jain purports that when put together in the right order and place, it makes sense. Her final words on the family are, "But it is a superstructure, the base of which is marriage."[1]

Deshpande's metaphor of husband as a sheltering tree is used as the name of Jain's next chapter. Jain expounds on the idea that in Deshpande's novels the element of romance as a prelude to marriage or marriage as a self-fulfilling experience is undermined and the social reality of caste and economic factors are highlighted. For various reasons, in marriage, body is foregrounded as a commodity. Jain rejects Pathak's idea that there is revulsion to normal physical functions in Deshpande's works. Deshpande merely opposes the idea of women being taken as breeding animals. That is why Deshpande's women question the romantic element associated with marriage as it is contradictory to the social reality and try to make some sense of it through a sexual relationship. Jain terms this movement from romance to realism as a move from innocence to experience. Most women marry as society expects them to be pro-creators or for economic security. Jain questions, "What happens to the idea of love in such arrangements?" (81) She proceeds with the dialectics that through conventions and ceremonies this strangeness is made acceptable. Even here initiative and passion are viewed as male prerogative. Moreover, when the physical union precedes love, the union is likely to bypass the willingness of the subordinate partner. This situation makes rape within marriage possible. Thus, marriages usually fail to allow space to an individual or create a total sense of belonging in an individual. This is when friendships outside marriage come into being. But they pose a new set of problems. Marriage has its unwritten code of expectations. Any activity that does not include the spouse is not acceptable. This is especially true in the case of women. Their husbands' interests and friends are thrust upon them. However, one of the reasons which makes marriage a necessity is the importance that widowhood divests a woman of.

Also, myths and popular cultural models which romanticize marriage and romance have nothing to say about widowhood or single parenthood. Jain points out that Deshpande's novels have many a reference to movies and mythologies. Deshpande's heroines are a far cry from Sita images. Spurned women like Sita and Shakunthala are shown in a new light. So is the action of Siddhartha who leaves behind a young wife. It should be noted that in Deshpande's novels even men are freed from the constricting images imposed on them. They are not shown in the heroic mould. Jain concludes the chapter by surmising that Deshpande in the context of marriage explores the socio-psychological needs of wives, de-glamourising the institution of marriage.

In the next chapter by the title 'Private Sorrows, Public Spaces', Jain takes up the idea of two kinds of memory, *Gedachtnis* – the memory related to the faculty of recall and *erinnerung* – an interiorisation of the faculty of recalling as referred to by Hegel in his *Encyclopedia*. For Jain the difference between the two kinds of memory lies in the relation to the self. In one, the act is objective and the self stands outside it and reviews, but in the other, the self is vested in subjectivity. That is why, such a recall could be accumulative or fragmentary or incomplete. Many novels of Deshpande deal with the poetics of loss and bereavement and the narrative strategy employed is that of recall. Jain rightly points out, "The relationship of the self with the sense of loss and the feeling of bereavement is a relationship that varies in its emotion and intensity with relation to the moment of recall. The relationship of the past with the present is always in a state of flux." (142)

Surprisingly gender has a say even in the aspect of bereavement. In addition to the natural difference men and women may have in their responses to bereavement, bereavement has other connotations for women. Women's role in a family is

foregrounded as wives and mothers without the primacy of the self. Hence the loss of a husband or an offspring implies the loss of power or status. Jain opines, "Women are dislocated for they are never seen as persons in their own right." (144)

Terming Deshpande a conscious artist, objective and ruthless, meticulously putting the narrative together and scattering clues all over the text, Jain in 'Inside a Writer's Mind' remarks that this strategy invites the reader to get inside her mind and travel the same road. However, the idea of getting into the writer's mind is full of complexities because of the socio-historical, cultural, mythical and language implications. Nevertheless, two aspects of her work are obvious to any and every reader, "Her work reflects not merely a universal category of urban middle class lives but an Indianness ... Another dimension of her work is the ability to move outside western framework of thought and influence and to place modernity in her own cultural roots." (195) Jain also takes cognizance of the fact that Deshpande's works abound in intertextuality. Jain writes, "For Deshpande, intertextuality becomes a dominant means of cultural interpretation and character formation, going beyond this, it guides the reader as to how to untie the text." (231)

Referring to Deshpande's repeated avowal that her writing is not the typical Indian Writing in English, Jain, in the chapter by the name 'Native Concerns' raises the question whether the difference is one of subject matter, approach, concern or of sensibility. She further questions if the difference is the outcome of cultural and environmental influence. She singles out the question of universalism, readership and modernity as important in the context of discussing Deshpande's Indianness.

In the penultimate chapter 'Woman as Writer' Jain explicates Rita Felski's definition of female *Bildungsroman*, which is different from that of male. *Bildungsroman*

is summarised by Jain as a process of becoming, of growing out of passivity and a secondary role is to acquire an agency. "The female *Bildungsroman* is firmly located in the individual psyche and is constantly caught up in a moment-to-moment confrontation with the socially prescribed codes of behaviour." (267) According to Jain, the narrative structure works at two levels. The first is in the realistic terms of education, economic independence, recognition of self-worth and acceptance of desire, which are necessary for selfhood. The second structure is through narrative terms of memory, myth, and female communities.

The last chapter 'Moving beyond the Given' discusses the mode of reversal often taken recourse to by women writers. But in Deshpande's case the mode of reversal is replaced by the realisation of imperfectability and self knowledge. The self knowledge makes Deshpande's heroines reject ideals of perfection and mythical examples. This awareness of the self with all its imperfection is significant. It gives women fresh choice within the old structure. The division between the home and the world collapses in the inner space of women and even when they return to their wifely duties, it is with a new 'self' that they do so.

Jasbir Jain's work can be considered a path-breaking work. The strength of the work, in a way, lies not in its exhaustive coverage of Deshpande's works (although in itself it is a stunning repertoire of critical concerns in Deshpande's creative works) but in the astounding ideas it throws open for further research. Thus, it turns out to be a route map of the various paths a research scholar attempting to study Deshpande may tread in hitherto unexplored terrains.

*Writing Difference: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande* edited by Chanchala K. Naik collates articles on diverse issues dealt with by Shashi Deshpande in her writings. Excerpts from these articles have been used through out the thesis with related topics.

A few critics see in Deshpande regressive mode of projecting women as going back to the traditional roles without the radical edge. Parvati Bhatnagar has a tinge of sarcasm when she comments that in three major novels of Deshpande, Deshpande takes up the theme of marriage and the treatment remains the same with the message being, "Go home like a good girl. Don't leave your homes and husbands. Retain your married status, maintain your marriage sensibly."[2]However, in the end, she concedes that Deshpande's message to women is to bring about a re-conciliation between tradition and modernity without losing her own identity.

This is the typical strain in many critics who attribute to Deshpande what can perhaps be termed conservative feminism or non-militant feminism. N.B. Masal witnesses the same strain in the portrayals of Deshpande and explains that in the realistic portrayal of middle-class women, Deshpande has no strident and militant kind of feminism that views man as the cause of all troubles. Basavaraj Naikar too considers Deshpande a sensitive writer who takes a balanced view of life from a woman's point of view while fighting against the patriarchal society and male domination without the extreme feminist stand. Naikar sees in Urmila, Shakutai, and Mira of *The Binding Vine*, women who endeavour to channelize their emotions in different ways because of their strong urge to survive. Naikar finds in the fiction of Deshpande an affirmative vision thereby upholding the ultimate goodness, beauty, and truth of life in line with the Hindu philosophy.

While delineating the progressive trends, critics invariable go back to the question of feminism. Even with the consciousness of Deshpande's reluctance to be labelled a

feminist, Rashmi Gaur joins those critics who place Deshpande in the feminist perspective. Gaur emphasises the idea that Deshpande passionately concentrates on the predicament of women being pushed towards the periphery. Gaur adds that Deshpande's plots and sub-plots provide a pointer to the catatonic status of women in the contemporary India, in which they are struggling to overcome the constricting dilemmas of pre-fixed definitions and pre-set norms, and thus attempting to redefine their status. Gaur quotes Balzac to argue that Deshpande's protagonists are the victims of pathogenic misogyny cited by Balzac in 'Physiology of Marriage', "Pay no attention to a woman's murmurs, her cries, her pains, nature has made her for our use and for bearing everything: children, sorrows, blows and pains inflicted by man. Do not accuse yourself of hardness. In all the codes of so called civilized nations, man has written the laws that ranged woman's destiny under this bloody epigraph: 'Vac-Victis' woe to the weak."[3]Gaur continues to affirm that the indoctrination of centuries endeavours to fashion a woman into the mould of womanhood.

A.N. Dwivedi includes Deshpande's writer father, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and George Bernard Shaw among the literary influences on Shashi Deshpande. While attributing to Deshpande unequivocal feminist stance, Dwivedi sees the influence of Western feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Freidan, and Germaine Greer. Responding to Deshpande's avowal that these feminists have only helped to put her confusions in order, Dwivedi writes, "These 'confusions' should have presumably been about the choice of her subject matter, its small or large canvas, and about the leading role, and through her practice in short stories she took no time in deciding these vital issues."[4]

Pashupati Jha and Nagendra Kumar also see a feminist in Deshpande although with a difference. They attribute to her, originality that is free of the intellectual grove of Anita Desai, aloof detachment of Nayantara Sahgal, and socialite whirlwind of Shobha De. They contend that when Deshpande questions the forced silence of women, at the basis of it is a 'lived' experience without any extra colouring of feminist tilt. The authors trace through the predicament of the protagonist Jaya in *That Long Silence,* the three phases of feminism of imitation, anger and protest, articulation and assertion. But they hasten to add that despite this, Jaya, with her traditional middle class background, is not a prescriptive feminist character. The writers conclude that the feminism of Deshpande is Indian in seeking the answer to marital problems within the same limitation by modifying the protagonist's anger through introspection and analysis.

In an article on Deshpande's *That Long Silence,* Dr. S. P. Swain takes up Woolf's metaphor of a room of one's own in the context of creative writing and ruminates that in the case of Jaya, the protagonist, it is the strong social and family pressure that stifles her creativity and holds all creative activities subservient to her role as a home-maker. He quotes a few telling lines from the novel to prove his point, "Even a worm has hole it can crawl into. I had mine – as Mohan's wife, as Rahul's and Rati's mother."[5] The recurring images of the sparrow, husband as the sheltering tree, and the myths like *The Ramayana* are also dealt with although briefly by Dr.Swain.

Tracing the conflict that has arisen due to social consciousness and position of Indian women, Nafisa Hatmi writes, "Conflict is an inevitable part of human life and human values in themselves create differences. These differences often take a violent turn. The concept of violence is complex, elusive and multi-dimensional."[6] Hatmi explores

expressions of this violence in Deshpande's 'The Intrusion' and Bharathi Mukherjee's 'A Wife's Story'.

Focusing on the theme of marriage in Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*, Y.S. Sharadha probes into the problem of marriage through Indu, the protagonist, and her cousin Mini, wherein one enjoys the freedom of marriage and the other accepts the traditional marriage.

Jyothi Jakhar's study of *That Long Silence* is divided into two parts: the protagonist's voice against the social pressures and expectations that define the lives of women in the Indian society and Jaya's self-quest and her ability to find her voice.

Anne Collette is of the opinion that throughout her writing career, Deshpande's central concern has remained unchanged and that is to define and differentiate the self from the other, to somehow render or realise the self as recognisable and comprehensible to its own self. Taking up the metaphor of a room of one's own, Collette discusses how Deshpande shows that even economic independence does not emancipate a middle class woman from psychological fetters and familial demands and constrictions. Collette observes that Deshpande's *Small Remedies* asks its readers if it might be possible to create a culture in which the natural, the human instinct for self-delight might flourish in symbiotic relationship with the loving roles of wife and mother. Extending the metaphor of room of one's own, Collette surmises that Deshpande's ultimate claim is for women to have right over their body and its demands. The body thus becomes a room. Just as men consider their body and bodily pleasures normal, women should enjoy autonomy over their body.

Mala Ranganathan has attempted a critique of the female protagonists in three of Shashi Deshpande's novels, namely *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows*, and

*That Long Silence*. She points out that in all these novels, Shashi Deshpande objectifies new female subjective experiences with a gynocentric vision. Ranganathan adds that Deshpande basically reflects on the problems and concerns of the middle class Indian women and Deshpande's writings, rooted in the culture in which she lives, remain sensitive to the common, everyday events and experiences and give artistic expression to something that is simple and mundane. Ranganathan further substantiates that Deshpande's feminism is peculiarly Indian in the sense that it is born out of the predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory identities: tradition and modernity, family and profession, culture and nature. Her art is intensely personal, not political. Her feminism rooted in the native environment tends to be humanistic and optimistic in its outlook.

The oft-recurring theme of mother-daughter relationship in the novels of Shashi Deshpande has attracted considerable critical attention. Rashmi Sahi traces 'mother-daughter relationship' in the novels of Deshpande and explains the root of insecurity a daughter may feel. Remarking that in our society a woman always has a peripheral existence, be it her parental home or be it her husband's home, Sahi concludes that such a situation forces the woman to search for her roots throughout her life, infusing in her a sense of insecurity. The daughter, being the closest to her mother, ends up sharing the same sense of insecurity. Sahi observes, "Shashi Deshpande has delved into the problem of every woman in this hypocritical society where she is rendered a second grade position but is expected to be the lynchpin of the family. This double edgedness plays havoc on her psyche. She is confused about her own role in society and family. Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the inner turmoil of a woman, fighting within herself, between her own knowledge and that thrust on her by the surrounding especially the mother."[7]

Vincent Aerathu comments on the telling pictures drawn by Deshpande of women who had traumatic experiences in their childhood and concludes that their struggle as wives and mothers is the legacy of a battered childhood.

Close on heels are familial themes, the oft-recurring concern in the literary world of Deshpande. Pier Paolo Piciucoo traces the major, distinctive traits in the fiction of Deshpande as homecomings, traditions, mothers, families, and past resolutions woven closely into a single corpus, which is difficult to disentangle from one another.

Santhosh Gupta finds Deshpande presenting social reality as it is experienced by women. This trend of speaking from within women's world, according to Gupta, is not a destructive or disintegrating attitude. For Gupta, presenting the world of mothers, daughters and wives is also presenting indirectly the arena of fathers, sons and husbands. Gupta refers to Deshpande's thematic concern of showing the clash between tradition and modernity by highlighting the tension the older women have with the younger lot. However, somewhere along the line in their adult life the heroines look back into the formative period of childhood and adulthood, which provides them with a new insight into their lives as women within a particular society.

Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan in her study of Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan and Manjula Padmanabhan throws light on the paradoxical influence of family on women in India. On the one hand, family has centrality in the life of a woman in her roles as daughter, wife, and mother, but on the other, family is also a major site of women's oppression with issues like gender discrimination, domestic labour, dowry, unwanted marriage, unwanted pregnancy, domestic violence etc. Hence "The recognition and articulation of this oppression is the first step in a feminist consciousness-raising..."[8] Sunder Rajan terms fiction which deals with the idea of liberating women from the

constrictions of the 'home' into the possibilities of the 'world' 'bourgeois feminist fiction.' Commenting on the narrative strategy of Deshpande in *That Long Silence* . Sunder Rajan terms it an exercise of memory and catharsis.

The unique approaches of a few other critics to the fictional world of Deshpande deserve special credit. For instance C. Vimala Rao finds in *Small Remedies* the most significant literary treatment of the Ayodhya incident. She rightly points out that if the art imagery of the films vivifies the terror, anger, and the misery of suffering in a raw and open manner, verbal art reaches inward into the passions and emotions that were at the root of this terror. She further comments that although the Ayodhya episode is present at the still centre of the novel, like the pea in the princess' mattress, the theme of the novel is contained in this seed. On the narrative technique, Rao concludes that Deshpande problematises the genre of the novel in order to show how difficult it is for someone to write about a person's life and to pack into words the facts, the truths, about the person.

Venugopal P. presents 'Bildungstroman' as the male narrative that records the hero's growth to manhood as a process of triumphant self-discovery and argues that a similar pattern is discernible in *The Dark Holds No Terrors.* Sarita, who remembers Betty Freidan as the one for whom it was easier to start the women's lib movement than to change her own personal life, presents the female bildungstroman.

On her part Anjana Sharma names Deshpande's work 'Indian English urban novel'. About Deshpande's narrative technique Sharma has the observation that, "Deshpande uses the technique of spliced time. Memories seep from past to present and loop back again as her womanly creations seek to come to terms with their schizophrenic existence."[9] Considering Deshpande's stance to be of resistance, Sharma offers the example of Deshpande's counterpoint to the great Indian myth that no divorce means a

happy union. Sharma too discusses Deshpande's preoccupation with the question of woman's body:

> Deshpande foregrounds the cultural angst of women wrestling with the emergence of their individual selves, with sexual desire, with the need to have greater control over their own lives, and most significantly, for the need to choose, to a small degree, the kind of lives they would like to live. And what is even more noteworthy is that her novels ultimately go beyond their seeming gender bias towards women's angst, to embrace the ungendered fears and frustrated desires of women and men who try to shake down customary obligations and traditional expectations.[10]

Towards the end of her article, Sharma draws an interesting, though hyperbolic, analogy between the predicaments of Manu of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* with the position of English literature in India. Manu is a poor shadow of Shelley and Sharma points out that his failure, the minute he steps out of the artificial world of university education in India, is tantamount to the English literature project in India. If it has to survive, it has to go beyond slavish devotion to its colonial inheritance and embrace the experience of its adopted country.

Indira Nityanandam attempts to show how "The silence that speaks more than words – the gaps that fill the spaces between words in thoughts, in conversation and in writing have always attracted and intrigued Shashi Deshpande."[11]Indira N. asserts that in *Small Remedies* along with the loaded silence of the narrator and Savitri Bai, the reader should neither miss nor misinterpret the silence of the novelist herself which is indicative of her actual intentions, the implicit, unstated or understated concerns related to women's issues.

Dr. Kishori Nayak explores the polyphonic and inertextual nature of *A Matter of Time* bringing to her canvas many a story, mythical, historical, literal or folk in nature to show how Deshpande has re-read them. She states, "This paper attempts to show how Shashi Deshpande, one of our well-known writers, in spite of disclaiming the feminist label, uses the feminist slant to subvert and redefine categories like silences and articulation, the latter being identifiable with story, (hi)story and (her) story."[12]

M.R. Harru attributes Deshpande's penchant for equal rights to her educational background of law. Harru discusses the protagonists of Deshpande in the psychoanalytical perspective placed dominantly in the family ideology.

It is discernible that even as critics take into consideration different themes, they also exhibit keen interest in the narrative techniques employed by Deshpande. P. Soumini throws light on Deshpande's narrative technique of using the authorial voice of the extradiegetic narrator – a popular method of classic fiction, no longer popular with the modern novelists. This technique gives the flavour of folklore to the storytelling.

M. Rajeshwar appreciates Deshpande as a writer with a gift for sharp psychological insight into the subtleties of human mind and society. According to him, Deshpande who is aided by a richly evocative, unassuming, and unpretentious style is ideally suited to tread the labyrinthine tracts of human psyche and creditably represent it in fiction. In Deshpande's use of dreams as a literary device, Rajeshwar finds strains of Graham Greene's artistry, as the subtlety and pointedness of dreams allow Deshpande to symbolically and artistically describe the reality about the life of her heroines and the partial relaxation of the ego's control during sleep enables the dream-work to symbolically present the unconscious motivations of the dreamer.

While chronicling the works of women novelists in India M.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan term the fictional world of Deshpande domestic. They see Deshpande employing the stream of consciousness technique going back and forth in time, giving the narrator the benefit of describing events with a hind sight.

Amidst all this, it is necessary to recognise those critics who credit Deshpande with the humanist approach because that is what the writer herself has claimed her concern to be. Deshpande who has repeatedly avowed her humanistic approach has Prabhat K. Singh recognizing this trend. Contending that viewing a piece of writing as that of a man or a woman takes away from it its human value, Singh opines that feminism with its gender bias has promoted individualism. Singh also opines that even those who are nativist in their literary culture are not free of the influence of different feminist trends such as French feminism for sexual freedom, American feminism for the assertion of the female self and British feminism for gender equality and respectability. Hence Singh's attempt is to study *The Dark Holds No Terrors* beyond gender consciousness. Singh's attempt is to liberate both the novel and the novelist from the gender prison with a view of underlining the artist's concern for humanity. Taking the novel as a work about life and living, Singh sees in the novel the existential predicament of both female and male characters. For Singh the novel portrays, "...a life's journey from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, from blockades to opening outs."[13]

Mala Renganathan terms Deshpande a humanist feminist and argues that it is in the writings of writers like Deshpande that one can find rich defense against the criticism that Indian feminism is an aping of the West. Renganathan finds in Deshpande's writings a deep insight into the plight of women who are caught in the predicament of being born as Indian women.

On the whole, critics cite responsibility, motherhood, mother-daughter relationships, isolation, and the need for physical/emotional space, the awareness of the impossibility of a unified monolithic and fixed narrative position as the themes dealt with by Deshpande.

The profusion of critical responses to Deshpande's works naturally raises the question of relevance in choosing Deshpande for further research. However, justification is not difficult. First of all, as Jasbir Jain has pointed out Deshpande's use of myths in her narrative has not been exhaustively dealt with and secondly interest in her recent novels: *A Matter of Time, Small Remedies, Moving on* as well as her short stories has not exhausted itself. That is why I will deal with the above mentioned novels and short stories at greater length, and consider the earlier works points of reference.

**VAIDEHI**

In comparison with the volume of critical response aroused by Shashi Deshpande, the response to Vaidehi's works or the availability of the response to Vaidehi's works appears to be limited. It raises many questions. The first question would naturally be on the quality of the work by these two writers. The fact that Vaidehi is the winner of Kendra Sahitya Akademi and that her short story 'Gulabi Talkies' has been used by the renowned film director Girish Kasaravalli should suffice to quell any doubt about the quality. The second question is about Literature in English reaching wider circles of the literati. In a globalised India, this possibility cannot be dismissed as far from reality. A comparison of the outcome of employment of different languages is not my objective. I refer to the possibility to merely explain the smaller volume of critical response to the writings of Vaidehi. Her singular contribution to Kannada literature has been captured in the words of

major modernist critic T. P. Ashok in *Gulabi Talkies and Other Stories* edited by Tejaswini Niranjana:

> An experiential world hitherto not seen in Kannada literature takes shape in Vaidehi's fiction. Women's inner desires, sorrows, promises, dreams speak to us in whispers. Instead of feeling as though some one is speaking on behalf of women with generosity, pity and compassion, we feel as though the woman is laying bare her inner self in an authoritative/authentic manner. Vaidehi's stories are unique for their subtle delineation of human feelings and situations, for the steadfastness of attention to detail, and for their artistic use of language.[14]

The same book quotes Kannada's leading feminist critic B. N. Sumitrabai:

> Vaidehi depicts the social situation of women in the way they live their personal lives – she seems to write as though with the consciousness of a witness… women have always sought to hide themselves in song, decoration, embroidery and storytelling. Sewing and song are their refuge… Vaidehi understands from inside the lives, environment and characteristics of women rather than grasping their experience through ideologies or theories (ix).

The conclusion Niranjana arrives at is that there is consensus among critics who stress the absence of artifice in the works of Vaidehi. Niranjana quotes Vaidehi's words to substantiate this critical perspective: "The kitchen is my guru; that's where I learned many lessons." (x) The editor shows Vaidehi's disassociation with intellectualism by quoting her words about her mother, "Anything I write today is two percent of what she might have written." (xvi)

Sara Abubakar, a Kannada novelist, writer, and critic, dissects male writing to argue that even renowned writers like V. M. Inamdhar and Bhairappa cater, through their writings, to the age-old myths of women's domesticity and chastity. She debates that Inamdhar in his novel *Mohini* by showing the protagonist who refuses to go back to her debauching husband, as deteriorating step by step, has contributed to the notion that the women who liberate themselves from the frame-work of family are sure to fall. Abubakar argues that in Bhairappa's *Vamsha Vriksha* the unfulfilled life of Kathyayini, a widow, who remarries, has a subtle hint of widow-remarriage being anti-religious. In Masthi's *Chikka Mallamma* the protagonist, who immolates herself, is admired as a fine example of womanhood. Sara questions such picturisations and states that men approve of such tragic ending to the lives of women who are supposed to be impure after being raped. As opposed to such trends, Sara finds women writers progressive in their projection of women. She cites M. K. Indira's *Phaniyamma* as an example of women writers' attempt to make society accept pregnancy in widowhood as it is after all caused by men.

Abubakar critiques Vaidehi's 'Shakunthaleyondige Kaleda Aparahna' by claiming that such re-reading is possible only by women writers. This she says bearing in mind the fact that Vaidehi projects Dushyantha as the man who had no love for Shakunthala. Vaidehi purports that Kalidasa being a male writer defended Dushyantha with the protective armour of forgetfulness, freeing him from the guilt of disloyalty. She goes one step further to argue that Shakunthala pretends to have lost the ring because she sees no point in joining a man who had no love for her. Abubakar sees in Vaidehi's Shakunthala a contrast to the heroines depicted by male writers. Vaidehi in turn traces Sara's career to the silent adjustments she had to make in her new home after her marriage. Vaidehi is of the opinion that the true seeds of literature must have sprouted then as a result of the conflict and tension in the new role. Vaidehi defines Sara's singular trait as the ability to

trait as the ability to deal with provocative situations without losing poise. Vaidehi is also appreciative of the non-interfering stance of Sara's husband.

Maheshwari U. sees in Vaidehi's works a protest against stratified society and gender discrimination. She recognizes the short story 'Nati' as one of the finest stories in Kannada. Her conclusion on Vaidehi's stories is that they are not judgmental about any one, but place before the readers the fine fabric of human emotions. Maheshwari also traces Vaidehi's attempts of rewriting the emotions of Shiva's consort Gowri in the poem 'Shivana Meesuva Hadu' from the anthology of poems titled *Bindu Bindige.*

Kota Lakshminarayan Karanth pays tributes to Vaidehi's prowess as a biographer. He attributes to Vaidehi the special skill of collecting and presenting the memories of achievers in the twilight of their lives. He has special words of recognition for Vaidehi as a columnist and translationist.

S.R. Vijayashankar, while acknowledging the similarity in background but difference in canvas of Vaidehi and Karanth, pays rich tributes to Vaidehi. He sees in Vaidehi a writer who has special place in her writings for all those who fight the injustice in society with revolutionary zeal as well as those who meekly carry on with their lives. Primarily, he sees in Vaidehi's stories a women's world which shows an insight into the men's world too. Appreciating the naturalness of the spoken Kannada of Kundapur in the works of Vaidehi, Vijayashankar remarks that each of her stories can very well be developed into novels.

Sukanya Kanaralli in "Sahithya Charithre: Stri Vadi Vimarshe" points out that while trying to trace the tradition of women writers, critics refer to Anasuya Shankar, whose pseudonym was Triveni as the first popular writer after whom a host of other women writers continued to pen popular fiction revealing a limited world-view. Sukanya

remarks that critics who easily dismiss women's writing as exhibiting a narrow vision do not take into cognizance the socio-politico-cultural forces influencing the writings of women, mainly to curtail it. While excluding women from mainstream literature and bracketing them separately as women writers, critics give them only a cursory glance and keep aside not more than a paragraph to critique their works. Sukanya wryly observes that when critics do write on women writers, it is as if it is an after thought. Sukanya satirises male critics who seem to have shown progress in moving from the stand of dismissing women's writing as domestic ideology to the stance taken to advise them by whispering truths into their ears. While terming such criticism ahistorical, Sukanya also throws light on forcefully imposing classifications on women writers merely because they happen to be the main trend of the time. Making an example of Vaidehi, she remarks that the criticism that imposes on Vaidehi the nomenclature of a rebel or *navya* writer is as hasty as the move of comparing the hidden agenda of a subjugated woman erroneously with the open revolt of Akka Mahadevi. Such an attempt, Sukanya argues, is simplistic without doing enough justice to the unique aspect of Vaidehi's writing. Arguing for the necessity to view women's writing as gendered writing, Sukanya concludes that no piece of writing can escape the historical, political, and social influences of the time and critiquing the work outside this framework reeks of unhealthy generalizations.

If B. V. Karanth voices his gratitude to Vaidehi for making time to collate the details of his life to bring out a book on his life experiences, K. Muralisidhappa in his preface pays tribute to Vaidehi as a great writer. He considers Vaidehi's tact of knitting different episodes in Karanth's life, without flying off at a tangent, incomparable. Although he concedes that the creative edge here and there might seem unnecessary to those who look for only the linear narration of Karanth's life, he defends Vaidehi's style by pointing out that at no point of time it is repetitive. He has no reservations in

concluding that the finesse of the book owes itself largely to the prowess of Vaidehi as writer.

Lankesh critiques some of the short stories of Vaidehi with the seriousness that they deserve. Remarking that Vaidehi's narrative style is complex with convoluted sentences, Havyaka Kannada words and descriptions that take time to sink in, Lankesh concludes that his penchant for not easily discernible style made him take a liking for Vaidehi's works. He adds that the paradox and the rebellion described by the creative impulse in Vaidehi's short stories are heart wrenching. He concedes that when a creative writer starts responding to situations in life, he himself is unaware of the creative possibilities. These possibilities will surprise him like the spring of water in a well newly being dug. Lankesh continues his critique by saying that it is not possible to categorise Vaidehi as either a social or a rebel writer. What one can infer is that she is sensitive in responding to the injustice meted out to her fellow human beings and this slowly but surely infuses her writing with notes of revolt. He makes a special mention of 'Bhutha' in which Vaidehi has touchingly portrayed how Parvathi, a spirited girl, loses all her vigour and ends up as a ghostly figure because of the constricting influence of poverty. Lankesh singles out 'Avalambitharu' to point out that when human relationship is dishonoured by the stratified society, servants who would have served their masters with loyalty turn out to be selfish workers giving primacy to money alone. Lankesh selects 'Chandhale' to point out that Vaidehi does not intentionally take recourse to the psychological approach to explain the inner urges of the young girl, but chooses to present, with more naturalness, the desire of the young girl to be a prostitute and the envy coupled with fear of Rami who is imprisoned in her restricted physicality. In Shakunthale, Lankesh sees the presence of a contemporary female unashamed of her physical urge. The final say of Lankesh on

Vaidehi is that she is a writer who inspired in him wonderment, new thought, and pride of writing.

Giraddi Govindaraja has given a mixed response to Vaidehi in 'Katha Sahithya'. While describing Vaidehi as a sensitive writer, who captures the life style of South Kanara, with realism and delicacy that is natural to women writers, Giraddi remarks that the storyline is lean with limited scope. While appreciating the tenderness with which Vaidehi has delineated the world of women through her protagonists who are almost always female, Giraddi feels that this also makes the style monotonous.

Dr. Shalini Raghunath categorises Kannada fictional writing into four stages. The first, according to her, comprises the works that came into being as the outcome of social reform movements. The second spanned the period from pre-Independence to post-Independence with realism and morality as its corner stones. The third was marked by the developmental zeal of the post-Independence era. The fourth, referred to as *Navya* in Kannada and modernism in English prioritized hitherto marginalized sections of society and it is into this category that writings of Vaidehi along with other writers like Vina, Sara Abubacker, Githa Nagabhushana etc. fall. In such writings characters have been moulded from the view point of women.

There has been considerable research work that has been taken up about the various aspects of Vaidehi's literary output. In her Ph D thesis Usharani Theggina Matada has dealt with the autobiographical details found in the works of Vaidehi. Usharani talks about the varied experiences that were available to Vaidehi in her childhood because of the family structure. Usharani also talks about how Vaidehi was inspired to try writing and getting what she wrote published when her brother's story was published. Usharani recognizes realism, self-realisation, social criticism, revolt, intellectualism and

introversion as the characteristics of Vaidehi's writing. Interwoven with these varied themes is the picturisation of the ripe life of women.

Shashikala M. Morada in her Doctoral thesis places Vaidehi among the third generation of writers such as Nemichandra, Nagaveni, Gita Nagabhushana and others who exhibit a new awareness while expressing themselves through different genres as poetry, novel, short story and criticism. Witnessing in their writing clear strains of feminism, Shashikala observes that along with the new awareness of womanhood and selfhood there is also the understanding of the harsh truths of reality. Sexuality, motherhood, financial independence, struggle for equality, attempts to create awareness among women are the dominant features of their writing. While talking about the tradition to which the modern writers belong, Shashikala points out that one can get glimpses of the lot of women in the literary world spanning an array of writers beginning with Thirumalamba and continuing with Janakamma, Leela Karanth, Kalyanamma R., Jayadevithai Ligade, H. V. Savithramma, Shanthadevi Malavada, Vasanthibai Padukone, Saraswathibai Rajawade and others. Shashikala observes that these writers wrote despite the constraints of the traditional set-up at home, household responsibility, widowhood, child marriage etc. If some of them had the opportunity of being educated and were encouraged by their fathers or husbands to write, some others had the chance of getting involved with the reformist movement. Thus, amidst various influences, both positive and negative, women's writing came into existence. Shashikala agrees with the remarks made by Mangala Priyadharshini that compared to the quality of the literary output of these early writers, the second stage writers such Triveni, Vani, Anupama Niranjana, M. K. Indira, Rajalakshmi N. Rao, Vina Shantheshwara, and Susheela Koppara disappoint readers.

Githabali Nayak dedicates a chapter to the works of Vaidehi in her thesis by the title *Kannada Kathana Sahithya Matthu Nirvachana.* Recognizing domestic ideology as the main thematic concern of Vaidehi, Githabali expresses the idea that Vaidehi brings to centre stage women belonging to different class, caste and condition. However, what runs through as the common factor among all her women is their helplessness. Even those women who toil and earn their living are not free. Their labour which merely fulfills their basic needs makes them depend on others. Although the desire to escape this predicament is seen in the majority and especially, the women of modern times, the route of escape or the route to freedom is not discernible to these. The family system, tradition, dependence, financial constraints and patriarchal society instill in women the sense of imprisonment. Since this state is reflective of reality, there are no clearly spelt out suggestions or clearly chalked out programmes for their emancipation. Githabali categorises Vaidehi's works on the basis of family and women, marriage and women, and models of women. In the last category she focuses on the liberated women characters.

K. R. Manjula divides women's writing into three phases: Pre-Independence era, Post-Independence Era up to 1975 and Post-Independence Era after 1975 till date. She places Vaidehi in the last category along with Rajalakshmi N. Rao, Vina Shantheshwara etc. It is in the writings of these writers that she sees strains of modernism in subject matter, plot and narrative. She delineates features of feminism built on the lines of individualism. Crediting Vaidehi with a special position of her own, Manjula posits that Vaidehi has maturity whatever be the subject matter, the subjects themselves ranging from rural life to problems of displacement posed by modernism. Choosing some of the short stories of Vaidehi Manjula studies the cultural, familial and social mores in the writings of Vaidehi.

Sujatha N. too chooses a few selected stories of Vaidehi under the caption *Vaidehiyavara Aydha Kathegalu.* Considering the works of Vaidehi inspirational, Sujatha claims that the height achieved by Vaidehi is a proof of the greatness a writer can achieve with involvement with the genre of creative writing. Tracing strains of feminism in all works of Vaidehi, Sujatha surmises that Vaidehi has a distinct angle while dealing with the problems of women. However, Sujatha adds, Vaidehi abstains from characterizing people using binary opposition of good and bad and shows them as mixed characters. Sujatha presents the astounding variety of women characters that can be found in the works of Vaidehi.

*Vaidehi Kathegalalli Stri Swathanthryadha Kalpane* is the title of Lavanya's dissertation. While stating that feminism which has sometimes been lampooned is now a force to be reckoned with even in Kannada literature, Lavanya argues that despite religious and social systems which have upheld women as goddesses and heads of clans, women have continued to be subjugated in India. Lavanya feels that although the pioneer women writers could not shake themselves off tradition and conservatism, their literary attempts on the face of constricting situations come out as remarkable. In the writers of the present times, Lavanya argues, one can decipher the influence of modernists like Lankesh, Kambara and Anathmoorthy along with psychiatrists like Freud, and existentialists like Camus and Kafka. Lavanya classifies Vaidehi's writings into two sections as the search for the nuances in the world of women and the attempts to face the challenges of life. In Vaidehi's projections, Lavanya finds two types of women: women who remain steeped in traditional values even in changing times by either choice or compulsion, women who liberate themselves from male dictates. The researcher argues that whatever might be the stand, love and respect for life are evident in every piece penned by the writer.

In the key note address in the seminar on Vaidehi organized by the Kannada Department of the Mangalore University on the Fifth and Sixth of February 2010, Sumitrabai observed that Vaidehi entered the literary field at the same time as the birth of women's organizations. According to Sumitrabai, this perhaps explains the preoccupation with women's issues and discourses on women in the writings of Vaidehi. What is remarkable is that Vaidehi achieves this without being polemical. Vaidehi herself avers that she has immensely enjoyed family life and has written from the experiences coming from the family life. Her love for life is easily discernible in her writings. In her address, Sumitrabai further pointed out how literature could at once be both private and public. Sumitrabai's opinion is that Vaidehi can not be bracketed as a woman writer as she is a powerful writer belonging to the mainstream literature. It should be remembered that until recently Vaidehi came under the attack for loose writing. Sumitrabai pointed out that it was only of late that Vaidehi was being taken seriously.

Speaking in the same seminar, M. S. Krishnayya compared the stories of Vaidehi to lyrics. He pointed out that in the writings of Vaidehi the boundary between essays and short stories was indistinct. While appreciating the suggestive quality of Vaidehi's writings, he pointed out that there was intimacy between language and narration in the stories of Vaidehi. He marvelled at Vaidehi's ability of fusing the past with the present. He stated that reading Vaidehi would be an enriching experience for all. In Vaidehi's feminism he saw an amalgamation of revolt, satire, irony, mute anger, all coming into contact with feminine sensibility. Making a special mention of *parsi Rathna* Krishnayya remarked that it was in the character of *parsi Rathna* that one could glimpse the smouldering anger like the volcano. He concluded with rich tributes to Vaidehi by adding that even gold mines could not enrich us as a good book could.

Dr. Maheshwari, in the same seminar critiqued the poetry of Vaidehi remarking that Vaidehi used domestic metaphors in her poems. Maheshwari also pointed out Vaidehi's trend of using words like song and lyric instead of the word poem, in line with the folk style. Dr. Maheshwari pointed out the feministic leanings of Vaidehi in the poem "Shivana Meesuva Hadu."

Dr. Vijayashri's session dealt with the only novel of Vaidehi. While dealing with the stratified society, Vijayashri argued, Vaidehi's aim had been to unearth the caste politics of higher caste people. Finding echos of Basavanna's preaching in Vaidehi's writing, Vijayashri pointed out the element of warmth pervading the writings of Vaidehi. While dealing with a writer, Vijayashri felt, it was necessary to take the two-pronged approach of noting what the novelist had said and what was it that she could have said. She found in Vaidehi's writing a rational and scientific approach to social justice and gender politics that moved beyond the title of domesticity. Commenting on Vaidehi's characterization, Vijayashri noticed that Vaidehi had contrasted Parthakka's unscientific approach to confinement against Saroja's scientific explanation for the necessity for rest during the confinement period. Vijayashri saw in the protagonist Bhaskar, not a rebel, but a sensitive human being who was trying to right the wrong done to the exploited, for centuries. After giving a detailed outline of the work, Vijayashri pointed out that the ultimate message of Vaidehi in the novel was to point out different types of untouchable practices existent in society even as the caste-based untouchability was being phased out. Vijayashri rightly surmised that Vaidehi seemed to offer education and inter-cast marriages as possible solutions to the ills of society and untouchability.

Dr. Sabitha Bannady touched upon the concept of regional culture evinced in the writings of Vaidehi. Remarking that Vaidehi's regional consciousness was different from

that of Karanth, Sabitha pointed out that Vaidehi had at the centre stage the question of women whose caste consciousness was invariably linked to class consciousness and gender consciousness. Concluding that Vaidehi had exploited the regional language to serve her purpose, Sabitha stated that the gender conciousness in Vaidehi's writings revolved around the women in the rural set up of Kundapura. The situations Vaidehi drew from were simple, day to day situations of the family visiting the old, bed-ridden senior members; people getting together on occasions like marriages, thread ceremonies etc. Modernity, when viewed from this angle of regionality, got equated with wealth, materialism etc. and men, on many occasions, reflected the violent side of regional culture. Sabitha's final words on Vaidehi were that in the literary world of Vaidehi one might not get to see the tumultuous move of oceans, but one could glimpse the vast sea of experiences available to women even when they were confined to the four walls of the house.

Speaking on 'Prabhandha Sahitya' Dr. Vasu termed Vaidehi's *Jathre* 'Lalitha Prabhandha' adding that this kind of literature got recognized as creative writing. Commenting on sparse references to social issues in Vaidehi's writings, Vasu voiced the opinion that perhaps the background of Vaidehi did not prioritize social issues. Remarking that Vaidehi's writing was not incisive, Vasu added that one could glimpse temperance, patience, inhibition amidst delicate nuances in the works of Vaidehi. Elaborating on the metaphors employed by Vaidehi, Vasu focused on the metaphor of the earth that Vaidehi employed while speaking about the relationship between men and women. Averring that Vaidehi viewed everything in the background of ancient India's religion and mythology, Vasu concluded that there was no scientific edge to the writings of Vaidehi. Vasu also pointed out how Vaidehi entered the world of literature without leaving the precincts of family. Throwing light on the warm and intimate narrative style of Vaidehi, Vasu

concluded that such softness was natural for women writers as opposed to the cutting edge found in male narratives.

Taking Kate Millet's S*exual Politics* as her reference point Meera discussed the gender politics in fictional writing in general and applied the norms to Vaidehi's works as well. Justifying the use of the word 'politics' while discussing gender issues, Meera argued that politics was just another word for tactics and in a patriarchal set-up, there had been the politics of keeping the female sex under the dominance of the male. Meera delineated various strains of feminism in the short stories of Vaidehi. If 'Chippu' showed that girls would be termed 'good' only if they complied with the expectations of society, 'Sougandhiya Swagathagalu' decried the concept of subjugating women in the name of protection and safety. Mandakka of 'Mara, Gida, Balli' debunked the glorification of motherhood and 'Bidu, Beru' denounced the societal practice of treating women as if they were cattle with strange practices as 'coming to *see* the girl', fixing her value with a dowry etc. 'Shakunthaleyondige Kaleda Aparahna' raised the question whether Dushyantha used Shakunthale. Characters like Puttamathe, Akku showed how different forces in society worked to undermine the self confidence of women and hurt them with sexist remarks. Beena who envied the life of a prostitute was a marker to the constricted life of the so called respectable women. The fact that, after her wedding, she too started sounding like much married wives in saying that her child was an exact replica of her husband, showed the power of indoctrination that society had on women. Her transformation made the speaker of the short story remark that the woman could not be the Beena of yester years. Meera concluded that the strength of Vaidehi's stories lay in the reactive politics Vaidehi had in response to the gender politics of society. Since the existing reality did not allow Vaidehi's protagonists to indulge in direct warfare, they

showed their subversion in guerilla warfare. In this stand of Vaidehi one could see the response to the subjugated life of women and the influence of feminism.

Dr. Narasimha Murthy dealt with Vaidehi's dramas and remarked that in each of the dramas one could see social relevance. He continued to say that even when the plays came under the category of 'Children's Plays', they did not fail in conveying social messages. This, he pointed out, made one wonder if children's literature meant literature for children; literature by children; literature by adults for adults in order to improve the lot of children.

Dr. Latha dealt with the autobiographical writings of Vaidehi. She was of the opinion that Vaidehi's writings reflected her deep love for life. In view of the fact that in Vaidehi's writings, demarcation between creative and autobiographical writing hardly exists, what is said about autobiographical writing can be applied to the creative field too. Many of her fictional characters are from real life situations.

Speaking in the Valedictory function of the same seminar, Dr, Chinnappa Gowda credited Vaidehi with the prominence of bringing to centre stage women's issues that had been pushed to the periphery. Continuing with the trends seen in the writing of Vaidehi, Dr. Gowda concluded that Vaidehi reflected the feminist stand of the 70's. He considered Vaidehi's stand an attempt to fortify family values. He placed women's movement along with two other powerful movements of the same time – end of colonialism and fight for the rights of the Dalits. While acknowledging that even male writers like Karanth have taken up women's issues, Dr. Gowda added that women in such writings somewhere along the line turned out to be helpless.

With three milestones in Vaidehi's literary career in the recent past, namely: *Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award*, adaptation of 'Gulabi Talkies' into a movie by the

renowned director Girish Kasaravalli and the position of Presiding Officer in *Nudisiri,* the interest in Vaidehi's contributions is likely to multiply. It would certainly be the well-deserved importance and her biographical writings and trsanslation works, possible sites for research, may then get close attention.

# NOTES

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[1] Jasbir Jain, *Gendered Realities, Human Spaces: The Writing of Shashi Deshpande.* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2003) 72. (All further references to the same work are incorporated in the body of the text itself.)

[2] Parvati Bhatnagar, "'Go Home Like a Good Girl': An Interpretation of *That Long Silence." Indian English Literature*: Vol. 2. Ed. Basavaraj Naikar. (New Delhi: Atlantic Publisher, 2009) 135.

[3] Rashmi Gaur, "Images of Indian Woman in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* – Stereotypes, Myths and Realities." *Writing The Female: Academy Awarded Novels in English.* Ed. Mithilesh K. Pandey. (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2004) 177.

[4] A.N. Dwivedi, "Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (88): A Feminist Reading." *Writing the Female: Academy Awarded Novels in English.* Ed. Mithilesh K. Pandey. (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2004) 139.

[5] S. P. Swain, "Articulation of the Feminine Voice: Jaya in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long silence*." *Feminist English Literature.* Ed. Manohar Bhatnagar K. (New Delhi: Atlantic, 1999) 73.

[6] Nafisa Hatmi, "Conflict and Violence in Shashi Deshpande's 'The Intrusion' and Bharati Mukherjee's 'A Wife's Story'." *Gender and Narrative*. Ed. Supriya Agarwal. (Jaipur:Rawat Publications, 2002) 195.

[7] Rashmi Sahi, "Mother – Daughter Relationship in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande." *Shashi Deshpande: A Critical Spectrum.* Ed. T. M. J. Indra Mohan. (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2004) 20.

[8] Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, "The Heroine's Progress: Feminism and the Family in the Fiction of Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan and Manjula Padmanabhan." *Dessert Bloom: Contemporary Indian women's Fiction in English.* (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2004) 81.

[9] Anjana Sharma, "In Exile/At Home: The Urban Middle class in Shashi Deshpande." *Dessert Bloom: Contemporary Indian women's Fiction in English.* (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2004) 98.

[10] Sharma, 100.

[11] Indira Nityanandam, "Deafening Silence: Reading between the Lines – Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies*." *Indo-English Fiction: The Last Decade*. Ed. Indira Nityanandam and Deena Kothari. (New Delhi: Creative Books, 2002) 143.

[12] Dr. Kishori Nayak, "(Hi)stories, (Her)stories as Point-counter point: Fiction as Counter Mode to Theory in Shashi Deshpande's Works." *Theory as Variation.* Ed. R. Radhakrishnan et all. (Delhi: Pencraft International, 2007) 263.

[13] Prabhat K. Singh, "Beyond Gender Consciousness: Reading Shashi Deshpande's Novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*." *Studies in Contemporary Literature.* Ed. R. S. Sharma. (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2000) 109.

[14] Tejaswini Niranjana, ed. *Gulabi Talkies and Other Stories.* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006) ix. (All further references to the same work are incorporated in the body of the text itself.)

# CHAPTER 3

## Critiquing the Novels of Shashi Deshpande

Shashi Deshpande's words on her own works as quoted by Naval Singh Kishore are, "In all my novels, from *Roots and Shadows* to *The Binding Vine,* I have rejected stereotypes and requestioned the myths which have so shaped the image of women, even the self-image of women, in this country. In a way, through my writing, I have tried to break the long silence of women in our country." [1]

If these are the words of the novelist herself, the approach of Deshpande has been summarized by Kalidas Misra as the mode of resistance and redefinitions, assigning to women new roles. Misra also throws light on how Deshpande shows, through the musings of her protagonist Jaya in *That Long Silence* that the Indian mythic mode does not provide women with a strategy for liberation from male hegemonies. Misra considers Deshpande's work crucial as a prototype for the emerging myth of alienation, isolation, redemption and restoration.

Appreciation notwithstanding, responses to her writings have been varied. They range from stark admiration for the writer to sarcastic dismissal of her as an unnecessarily polemic woman writer. The reactions themselves are pointers to the current trends in society as far as women's issues are concerned.

Murali Manohar D. can be singled out as he represents that facet of criticism which is steeped in traditional ideas about women and women writers. He studies Shashi Deshpande's protagonists of three different novels - Indu, Saru, and Jaya - as representatives of educated women, to discuss the issue of marriage. However, he does

nothing more than describe the circumstances that lead to the marriages - love marriages in the case of Indu and Saru and arranged marriage in the case of Jaya. The argumentative edge of the essay lies in his total disapproval of Deshpande's stand on extra-marital affairs as experiences free of guilt. He is equally censorious of critics like Jasbir Jain and Anita Singh who justify the situation as the women's right to their body and the bodily demands. He naively asks, "What happens if men also think in Indu's manner?"[2] He seems to miss out totally on the point that the whole question of such sexual politics is an off-shoot of the circumstance wherein men *do think* in this manner, but consider it shameful and immoral for women to do so. The question of morality within the institution of marriage has always been differential for men and women. Murali D. confines the issue to the usual frame work of morality and immorality losing sight of the fact that Deshpande and her critics (mostly women) tackle the question in the broader framework of women's right to their body, their acceptance of the bodily urges as natural, their readiness to refer to their natural instincts and their guiltless action in fulfilling those desires. Perhaps it is worth noting that Murali D. quotes at length those passages which are the very grounds for his objections! Urmila and Vanaa are studied by the author in the context of educated women and their career. While throwing light on Urmila's love-cum-arranged marriage Murali D. tritely comments that such a marriage is the ideal one. Here again the writer seems to have bypassed the complexities of life in thinking that an ideal marriage as explicated by him is within the reach of every individual for the asking! Nevertheless, the writer needs to be congratulated on the choice of his subject matter which is not a quotidian issue.

Khatri C. L. is no less incisive. Dismissing the very concept of feminism as a western junk imported by the so-called civilized and progressive women of India or say "the English Queens"[3] Khatri concludes that feminism offers no alternative to the time-

tested social system. Criticising Deshpande for projecting the husband as enemy number one in *The Dark Holds No Terrors,* Khatri proceeds to argue that such a stand will not lead to an egalitarian and harmonious society. It is rather sad that Khatri is totally blind to the sensitivity with which Deshpande has dealt with the tenuous conjugal relationship between Sarita and Manohar. Sarita, even after being raped within marriage by a sadistic husband, admits, "We belong to the same caste. Both of us despise ourselves. What he does to me, he does it not so much because he hates me, but because he hates himself. And I... I hate myself more for letting him do it to me than I hate him for doing it to me."[4] She knows that the root cause of the problem is the success of the wife pitted against the failure of the husband. She observes, "...the esteem with which I was surrounded that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband." (42)

In another article, Khatri Lal Chhote takes up Simone de Beauvoir's concept of a woman becoming a woman instead of being born a woman and declares that Jaya of *That Long Silence* is an example of this. Focusing on the metaphor of husband as the sheltering tree, Lal concludes that centuries long sheltering has made women too weak to lead an independent life. He further adds that Deshpande's women in general lack the courage and fortitude. Singling out a sentence in which Jaya says that there can't be an angry young woman, Lal argues that the statement is indicative that Deshpande has only an aerial view of the situation. He continues to argue that there are many women who dominate over their husbands. Lal's argument is rather lopsided. When a statement is made, it does not mean there cannot be exceptions. Certain conclusions are arrived at based on general truths. It is a generally and widely accepted fact that women are less violent than men. They do not easily give vent to their anger. This again can be traced back to social strictures which have repeatedly allowed a man free flow of anger as a sign

of manliness while curbing the same in a woman. Deshpande merely highlights this indisputable fact. It can be remembered that Vaidehi too adheres to the same notion. In her collection of articles called *Lekakiya Putagalu,* which means 'pages of an author', Vaidehi rightly points out that if a man's anger transforms itself to violence, a woman's anger converts itself into tears. Moreover, critics like Khatri C. L. miss out on the multiple approaches of the writer to women as wives.

But women critics are more sensitive to such trends in Deshpande's writings and respond positively to them. While critiquing the short stories of Deshpande, Kalpana H. throws light on the debunking of popularly held myths by citing the example of 'A Day like Any Other.' The wife in the story, on knowing about her husband's extra-marital affair is not shattered. Her husband's infidelity strangely fills her with a sense of relief that her life is her own. Shalmalee Palekar also takes up the question of 'sexual liberation' in Deshpande's novels. She rightly points out that while the instances of extra-marital relationships referred to in the works do not seem to directly critique women's liberation, they do legitimise a woman writer's freedom to refer to such issues in a non-titillating way on the one hand and are a pointer to a woman's acceptance of her body on the other.

Even among women critics there is disapproval of some traits in the writings of Deshpande. K. Suneetha Rani admits that the message of the novel *Roots and Shadows* is that a woman of self-respect, if she is not self-reliant, cannot protect her identity. However, for Rani, Indu, the protagonist, remains a negative example of this message, rather than a positive assertion. Rani further criticises the idea that while succeeding at provoking thoughts about right and wrong, the novel fails to define the right. Rani posits the post-Independence modern woman as the one caught in a transitional period. Rani

feels that in her quest for identity and self-assertion, an Indian woman is a bundle of confusion. However, in all fairness to Deshpande it is necessary to acknowledge that she abstains from offering unrealistic solutions to existing problems and her central concern lies with highlighting the predicament of women as each woman has to find her own solutions as there cannot be a universal remedy.

While critiquing the initial novels of Deshpande, only those aspects, which have a direct bearing on the key term of the thesis – myths, as the invisible conditioning force in society and the writer's attempts to reread some time-tested myths, the power of which has led to the false conditioning of women in society, have been dealt with. This selective approach is in view of the fact that the earlier novels have been used as sites of debates on diverse themes, as indicated by the literature review.

***The Dark Holds No Terrors***

Deshpande acknowledges that her first novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the work that came closest to the vision she had of it when she conceived it. *The Dark...* shows that the travails of Sarita, the protagonist, are not so much the outcome of *hubris,* as they are of ideologies. Deshpande exploits the situation of Sarita addressing a group of college students as their chief guest, to satirise the patriarchal dictates to a woman. In a speech, which Sarita plans, but never delivers, she imagines herself persuading the students:

> Listen, girls, she would say, whatever you do, you won't be happy, not really until you get married and have children. That's what they tell us. And we have to believe them because no one has proved it wrong till now. But if you want to be happily married, there's one thing you have to remember. Have you girls seen an old-fashioned couple walking together? Have you noticed that the wife always

walks a few steps behind her husband? That's important, very important, because it's symbolic of the truth. A wife must alway be a few feet behind her husband. (137)

Sarita goes on to list other factors such as height, salary and position in society in which a woman has to take a subordinate position. If the woman happens to be stronger, then it is imperative that she pretends to be weaker. That is the only way to survive. The satirical edge is unmistakable and the outburst is the outcome of Sarita's plight of being more successful and earning more than her husband does. Sarita's painful realization is that success in life is at the cost of peace and happiness in marriage and the pain of being raped by her husband who is as much a victim of societal expectations as she herself is. It is this understanding of the predicament of her husband's plight that makes Sarita take the decision of meeting and facing him after fleeing from him and after having taken refuge in her father's place.

The novel also graphically presents the girl child's rebellion against the mother whose obsession with the dead son is an ordeal for the living daughter. Sarita's love marriage with Manohar is, in a way, an answer to the mother whose outburst at the time of her younger brother's death was, "You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you still alive, when he's dead?" (191) It is essential for the spurned daughter to prove that she is desirable to some one and is loved by some one. Even her silence after being tormented by Manohar is the refusal to reveal a crack in the idyllic picture she had created of her life with Manohar.

Not only the central figures but also the women in the periphery contribute towards the central motif of the effacement of the self that women are made to suffer. Sarita describes the wife of Manohar's friend as:

> The woman came in later with trays of food, cups of tea and glasses of water. She came in silently unobtrusively, like a shadow and went out in the same way, her husband's conversation not interrupted even by a fraction of a second by her presence. He did not introduce her to us, and so strong was the man's disregard of her presence that we ignored her too. (158)

Sarita, who ignores the existence of such a woman, at this stage in life, later has a deeper perspective. The case of Madhav's mother, for whom the refusal of her husband to eat the food cooked by her is a deprivation, makes Sarita ponder over the story of the woman who would not disturb her husband's sleep even to save her child from the fire:

> A woman so blessed, it was said, that Agni himself came and saved the child. Now she thought… who wrote that story? A man, of course. Telling all women for all time… your duty to ME comes first. And women, poor fools, believed him. So that even today, Madhav's mother considers it a punishment to be deprived of a chance to serve her husband. (207)

The phrase 'all women for all time' is significant. It implies the all-encompassing influence of such myths on all women, at all times. The constriction of male writings and Manusmrithi questioned by Deshpande is discussed by Kailash C. Baral. Baral finds it ironic that Manusmrithi is often internalised by women themselves in traditional set-ups. However, Deshpande's attempt is to show that there is no irony at all because the present straight jacketing of women has its roots in the past, in its stories, fables and myths which make women accept the unnatural as the natural.

Arindam traces similarities in Sarita, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and a patient cited by D.W. Winnicott in his paper 'Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self.' While keeping aside the question whether Deshpande has read

Winnicott or not, Chatterjee declares that Sarita reads straight out of the numerous case histories of this psychoanalyst. It is the problem of a woman living with a false self for a long time, trying to find her true self. If the patient is helped by Winnicott, Sarita is helped by her father in the process of self-realisation and self-acceptance. Even if the resemblance between Winnicott's patient and Sarita is very close, the pertinent observation to make would be to recognise patriarchy as the common victimising factor in the lives of many a woman irrespective of her race and nationality. This explains the novelist's earnest concern in tracing Sarita's progress towards autonomy as not a peculiar, but general problem of the gendered female. The strength of the novel lies in the invincible spirit of Sarita which makes Sarita rise like a phoenix to fight against the odds although resignation might have been easier. She is enlightened by the words of *Dhammapada* – "You are your own refuge." Her final words are, "If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk." (220)

It is rather disappointing that the profound philosophical edge that is interspersed in the novel which becomes even more prominent in the concluding part of the novel is not given its due importance by critics. In the article 'The Contributions of Women to the Development of the Indian English Novel' B.D. Sharma and S.K. Sharma conclude that in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the protagonist realises that she has been highly individualistic and has lost her brother, her mother and her husband's manhood on account of this outlook of hers. The Sharmas further observe that the ending suggests that Saru has now become heedful of her domestic duties. According to the authors, this signifies that Deshpande is not an aggressive feminist and that her attitude towards men is conciliatory and not partisan. They further observe that this fact signifies that in spite of her being a woman, she is not to be regarded as a feminist.

Although there can be no disagreement about the idea that Deshpande's stand is not partisan, it would be rather puerile to take the conclusion as Sarita's realization of her neglect of domestic duties and her rejection of the individualistic stand. In fact, in the end, there is a movement towards autonomy, coupled with the understanding that the discord in marriage results from egoistic, mutually exploitative relationship. The answer lies in not escapism, but an honest attempt to work out a relationship in which neither feels stifled. This would call for certain reformulations and reformation in the heterosexual institution of marriage. It is the woman's understanding of the self, her appreciation of it and her decision to stand by it that make the novel a refreshing one.

***If I Die Today***

Deshpande's second novel *If I Die Today* is a far cry from her first novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. First serialized in the *Eve's Weekly* in a much shorter version, under the same title, the novel takes off from Thomas More's line, "Then in good faith is there no difference between your grace and me, but that I shall die today, and you tomorrow?"[5] However, neither the philosophical nor the feminist edge has depth. The plot as detective fiction hasn't much to boast of and the loosely held novel makes one wonder if Deshpande's creative genius failed under the constricting weekly demands of *Eve's Weekly.* The situation resembles the trivial work of Jaya of *That Long Silence* who deliberately writes fiction that would appeal to the masses although it is against her creative spirit.

Avadesh Kumar Singh in 'Reading into *If I Die Today*' justifies his selection of a marginal text by stating that in this work too Deshpande's primary concern is death and relationships as in other novels. He argues that a work should not be judged as major or minor depending upon its reception by the readers. Instead a work's centrality among the

works of an author should depend on the author's preoccupations in general. Singh throws light on Deshpande's sketch of a passive, aggressive husband who neither hits his wife nor says even a single angry word to her, but makes her feel guilt-ridden and censured by his actions and sly comments. However, Singh sees in such depictions no adherence to feminist ideology, but commitment to human situations.

While Singh's attempts to evaluate Deshpande's work outside the precincts of feminism by viewing it as commitment to human situations and thereby humanism is appreciable, the fact remains that neither the feminist nor the humane concerns are potent enough to leave lasting impressions on the reader. The effort seems to be a strained one and fails to get interwoven naturally with the plot of the novel. If one considers the fact that this novel was written when Deshpande strongly contested the idea of being viewed as a feminist, the feminist concerns which are markedly present pose a question of another kind. Does it so happen that when the writer is female, feminist concerns get voiced with or without the intention of the author? In the novel, we see that Ashok, the debonair male, indulges in extramarital affairs and justifies himself by saying that it is his wife whom he truly loves. He claims complacently that she would both understand and forgive his light flirtations. Dr. Kulkarni is yet another example of, "the same kind of Indian male." (27) Sumanth falls under the same category although for a different reason. He is one of those men who expect to be waited upon hands and feet by their wives. While these men are satirized, there are also fleeting references to the paradoxical nature of motherhood. It is shown to be at once a woman's sense of achievement and imprisonment. Manju angrily blurts out in a party, "For God's sake don't talk about my pregnancy and the baby. It seems to me there's nothing else anyone can say to me. Makes me feel like a breeding animal." (23) In Guru she confides that the whole process of conception and birth seems to be a meaningless cosmic accident. After a confrontation

with her husband which is the result of disobedience of her little daughter Sonu, Manju's feelings are, "For a minute I hated myself and the child I was carrying." (48) This mood of gloom is apparent in the words, "Motherhood, I thought, it's a trap. Keeping you in a cage until you lose the desire for freedom; until you forget what the word 'freedom' means." (47) But there are other moments which are contrary in spirit. After sending Sonu to her grandmother's place Manju yearns to have her back. Thus the ambivalence in the attitude is introduced at different levels to point out that 'motherhood' is not as glorious as it is made to seem. Women are perhaps made to believe that it is purely beautiful so that they learn how to accept it as the most significant and meaningful role that they have to play.

*If I Die Today* can be taken as an example of the novelist's penchant for human relationships even when it is not the central idea of the work. Neither can the novelist abstain from dealing with feminism, the natural corollary of human relationships.

***Come up and Be Dead***

It will not be erroneous to consider *Come up and Be Dead,* the second huge failure of Deshpande. Here, Deshpande tries the balancing act between a family line and a detective plot. In the supposedly mysterious plot, Devayani, the protagonist is assigned the role of Dr. Watson although the Police Inspector bears no resemblance to Sherlock Holmes. The first part is authentic to the extent of creating a scenario of an English Medium School, still suffering from colonial hangover. Within the framework of the school, a few streaks of Deshpande's thematic concern of other novels, 'human relationships' make an appearance. While Kshama, the ambitious Headmistress maintains Pratap, her unsuccessful brother with a mental disorder, merely because of her sense of duty, Devayani, a spinster has a stronger bond with him, in spite of not being bound to

him in any way. The stories of Kshama and Devayani run parallel to each other although the two are antithetical in nature. Kshama's supreme motive is to be successful in the world where as Devayani willingly confines herself to the home. Both get threatened by the mysterious deaths on the premises. If Kshama is on the verge of losing her position, Devayani is in the danger of getting involved with the complicated episodes. However, with the denouement, the courses of their lives go back to normalcy and both are able to pick up the thread of their existence from where they had left them. In the process, both undergo a lot of emotional crises and succeed at attaining a clearer picture of themselves and of life. Kshama is distraught with guilt and sorrow with regard to Pratap and her suffering makes her shed her self-centeredness. Devayani's self-effacing personality changes from being a person who continuously hankers after the physical comforts of others to the one who is conscious of her self. Yet, the novel stops short of making a deep study of the predicament of spinsters, in its eagerness to maintain the aura of suspense. Deshpande's proclivity to deal with the theme of parent-offspring relationship crops up here too. Kshama is the child on whom the ambition of her father has been centered, since, Pratap, the son is a failure, but at the time of death, it is the son that the father yearns for as it is the son who can perform his last rites. However, it is the daughter who nurses the father when he is on the death bed. Although the incident is reflective of the author's disapproval of the tradition that confers on sons the right of last rites, in the broader frame work, the novel fails to tackle convincingly the question of the position of women in the traditional set-up. The issue is left without an honest attempt at reformulations in society as if it were too complicated to be discussed within the framework of a detective novel. Even the question of innocent girls being caught in the corrupt system is taken up merely to introduce the element of mystery and murder rather

than as a conscious effort to deal with a social evil. Thus the novel stops at possibilities alone.

Rama Gautam, while analysing the recurrent theme of human relationships in *Come up and Be Dead,* also discusses the metaphor of silence that is imposed on women, especially in the case of marital rape and the negative portrayal of the mother figure. Yet, the final word of Rama Gautam is that despite the protagonist being a woman, it cannot be considered a feminist novel as there are other equally compelling issues. This practice of tracing feministic concerns only to declare that the novelist is not a feminist seems to be the off-shoot of the criticism made by scholars like Jasbir Jain who argue that one should look beyond feminism in the works of women writers. The same consciousness makes critics substitute the word 'feminism' with 'womanism'. But, if feminism is understood as an earnest effort to improve the lot of the marginalized section of society, we will not get lost in terminologies. Neither will we be apologetic about tracing feminist trends in writers.

***Roots and Shadows***

Dr. S.P. Swain goes to the genesis of feminism in his study of Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows:*

> The term feminism was first used by the French dramatist Alexander Dumas, the younger, in 1872 in a pamphlet 'L' 'Homme-femme' to designate the then emerging movement for women's rights. An anti-masculine movement of the women for the assertion of their individual rights, feminism is also called Aphraism after Aphra Behn, a seventeenth century feminist and political activist.

> Feminism recognises the inadequacy of male-created ideologies and struggles for the spiritual, economic, social and racial equality of women sexually colonised and biologically subjugated. An expression of the mute and stifled female voice denied an equal freedom of self-expression, feminism is a concept emerging as a protest against male domination and the marginalisation of women.[6]

Dr. Swain also traces the three phases of imitation, protest and self-discovery, posited by Elaine Showalter, in the novels of Deshpande. Swain feels that a new perspective has dawned on the Indian social horizon with the feminine psyche trying to redefine the woman's role in society and re-assert the woman's self-identity.

In 'The Self as Contestation in *Roots and Shadows*' Parag Moni Sarma concludes that the narrative mooring of Shashi Deshpande lies in the familial politics of inheritance and succession. Sarma borrows an idea from Ramanujan in considering Deshpande's narrative 'women's narrative' as her work is a story told by a woman about women. Sarma also contests that if the study of family is through the lived experiences of everyday life, it turns out to be a cultural study which has its roots in sociology and anthropology.

The observations of the critics point at feminism and family as the two prime sites of debate in *Roots and Shadows.* It is true that the novel lends itself richly to these key areas of study. The novel lays before the readers a collage of a large family about to disintegrate into smaller units for financial and other reasons, with the death of Akka, a wealthy widow, hitherto acting as the cohesive force. Indu, the protagonist, who had succeeded at defying the tyrannical presence of Akka by walking out on the family at eighteen, to marry Jayant, a man of her choice, returns home at twenty nine, invited by

Akka, to be her heiress. However, Indu feels bogged down by the sense of responsibility and the hostility of other members who are resentful that the prodigal daughter is ungrudgingly privileged. The property issues show people in their true colours, although characters like Old Uncle, Atya, and Naren are above the mundane. For Atya, a woman widowed at a young age, the only meaning in life lies in bringing up the children of other people and performing household chores. Naren's day to day existence does not include the question of tomorrow and hoarding for that tomorrow. Old Uncle is totally detached from the petty machinations of others although his attachment to the house is strong. The nature of the other people can be summed up in one line from the novel, "… they don't mind getting nothing so long as the others get nothing too!" [7]

The novel, apart from throwing light on human nature, raises questions on the institution of marriage through characters like Mini and Akka. Mini shocks Indu because for Mini it is marriage that matters and not the man. Her consent to marry a rich man who is not 'too bright' with the reasoning that she has no choice annoys Indu. Indu reflects, "Surely, it is this, this fact that I can choose, that differentiates us from the animals. But years of blindfolding can obscure your vision so that you no more see the choices. Years of shackling can hamper your movement so that you can no more move out of your cage of no-choices." (125) If the story of Mini is the usual story of hundreds of girls who are made to take marriage as the only goal in life, the story of Akka is not so common, and much more pathetic. Akka gets married to a rich man at twelve, only to become a young, rich widow with nothing save bitterness and the desire to dominate. The complexities of her domineering existence are explained to Indu by Atya, a witness to the hardening of Akka's heart. The finer shades of Akka's character find a display only when she is viewed as a prey in the household of her in-laws. The small, dainty, pretty, round-faced, fair skinned, straight nosed, curly haired girl is sent to her in-laws house only to plead

with her mother-in-law to lock her up because being locked up is less tormenting than being with the coarse and bulky husband. But as Atya says, "...there was no escape from a husband then." (70) At the death bed of her husband, on knowing that he yearns to see his mistress, she says maliciously, "Listen to me. It's my turn now. I've listened to you long enough. She came here. Twice. She wanted to see you. I threw her out. You'll never see her again." (71) If her response is singled out without being placed in the framework of being victimised, it will be seen as the capacity to victimise. But the truth is that these are not the vicious words of an insensitive woman, but the pathetic words of a woman who has cried every night of her twenty odd years in her husband's house without anyone trying to understand her pain. Her bitterness is so great that her words to her young niece before the niece's marriage are, "Now your punishment begins, Narmada. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels." (70) What makes her case so pitiable is that she has absolutely no escape route from her marriage. Motherless and with a father who is aloof, the young girl tries twice to run away, only to be locked up, starved and beaten. Akka's case once again is typical of those hapless women for whom *mangala sutra* turns out to be an inescapable noose. The irony is that the Indian concept of the girl given in marriage being no longer a legitimate part of the family that makes families close the doors on the married daughter does not disallow her entry into the family in the widowed status. But the doors open only to offer the life of drudgery. Atya or Narmada who falls under this category has an understanding brother who categorically refuses to tonsure her head, but can do nothing about the second-class-citizen treatment given to her in the kingdom of widows.

Indu herself, despite the fact that hers is a love marriage, stands for the inherent deception in most marriages. She confesses about her husband, "... it shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I'm like that. He turns away from me. I've

learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I'm passive and unresponsive. I'm still and dead." (83) The lines clearly question the idea of women as passive recipients of pleasure. It is as if to escape this passivity that Indu gets involved with Naren. But that doesn't lead to fulfillment either. It makes Indu realize the veracity of the words of Old Uncle, "There have to be some rules so that life can have both dignity and grace. We can always find measures of freedom within these rules." (15) Measures of freedom, Indu realises are the efforts to be free of the fetters of pretension and dishonesty. Yet, she decides to reveal nothing to Jayanth. She glibly dismisses the whole episode by saying, "Nevertheless I knew I would not tell Jayant about Naren and me. For that was not important. That had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together." (187)

It is the projection of deception in marriage that has led to a lot of flak from conservative critics. In a way it is true that Deshpande shies away from getting down to the roots of the problem and glosses over it in the guise of philosophy and intellectualism in this novel. It is in her later novels, Small Remedies and *Moving on* that she has taken up the question of transparency in marriage and the need for it despite dire consequences, with more seriousness and greater depth.

***That Long Silence***

The inscription of *That Long Silence,* "If I were a man and cared to know the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy – the weight of that long silence of one-half of the world," challenges the smugness of the male-centered culture. The novel has an interesting plot of the degradation of the husband culminating in the self-actualisation of the wife. Mohan's indulgence in malpractice is the result of his overriding ambition to get out of the shadow of his lower-middle class, penny-pinching past, although he gives it the colouring of trying to give the best to his family. His double

standard is evident in his very reason for marrying Jaya. Although he marries her because she seems to fit the description of a society lady, he expects her to model herself after his mother who never raised her voice against her husband however badly he treated her! Jaya herself is content to find in her husband a sheltering tree and for seventeen years conforms to the idea of an ideal wife. Her thread-bare bio-data with references to only her marriage and number of children is a satirical reference to the marital status of a woman that makes her consider everything else that falls outside the precincts of her roles as wife and mother irrelevant. It is surprising that a girl, who was named by her father Jaya, a word for victory, turns out to be docile. The conditioning begins with a new name, Subhashini, given to her by her in-laws. Added to this are Vanitamami's maxim that husband is like a sheltering tree, Ramukaka's message that the happiness of her husband and home depended entirely on her and Dada's advice to be good to Mohan. The message that gets imprinted in the female psyche is the magnified image of the husband and the shrunken self. As Virginia Woolf says, "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size… for if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished." [8]

Thus, lies and deception enter the scenario of marriage, building a wall of silence between the couple. Jaya's creative impulse is stifled and silenced when she is accused by Mohan of having revealed too much of their personal lives to the public. Another form of silence is imposed on her. There is also the self-imposed silence in the case of Jaya's friendship with Kamat. In the institution of marriage there is no word to explain or accept a woman's friendship with the opposite sex. Therefore, Jaya denies herself the happiness she feels in her association with Kamat.

Yet, along with all these denials, there is a movement towards self-actualisation. It is in the dullness of having to do nothing that Jaya starts squaring her conscience. It is the self-contemplative mood that makes Jaya look at herself, her husband, her children and her life afresh, free of self-deception. It is then that she realises the import of the words from *the Geetha,* "Yathecchasi tatha kuru,"[9] "Do as the will dictates." It is at this point of time that she realises the futility of going through life like two bullocks yoked together. She also clearly sees the gaping hole in the heart through which by degrees a habit of lying has entered. If it is impossible to live with the hole in the heart, it is possible to plug it by erasing silences and make life possible. However, as shown in the novel, the large majority of women continue to remain mute. Mohan's mother is a typical example of women who choose to suffer even after being tortured by their chauvinistic husbands. The image of the woman who silently cleans the floor, of the spattered food, the result of the husband's ire at the wife for not having prepared fresh chutney, although the time is late in the night, is the story of many a wife victimized by the husband. Silence and suffering close in on all sides in the lives of these women. Mohan considers the silent suffering of his mother a sign of strength. But for Jaya, it is despair so great that the only weapon is silence and surrender. This difference in attitude is significant. Despite his compassion for his mother and spite for his father, Mohan unconsciously expects every woman to be the epitome of sacrifice and martyrdom. When Jaya turns out to be different from his mother, he does not assert his rights, for it would mean following in the footsteps of his detestable father; instead he turns away from Jaya in horrified silence, flabbergasted by the idea of wives raising their voices against their husbands. Thus are lain the bricks of silence in the conjugal relationship. Thus, Deshpande shows that the story of male hegemony too is tortuous. If the stories of Mohan's mother and Jaya bring to the forefront silences that can exist either blatantly or subtly, the references

to Nayana and Jaya, the maid-servants, bring to the forefront the distressing plight of lower-class women, bravely fending for themselves against all odds. Nayana's craving for a male child has a different basis altogether and Deshpande makes it amply clear that if a male child is preferred by the mother, the reason is her unwillingness to expose the girl-child to the inequality and injustice prevalent in society. Nayana asks, "Why give birth to a girl, behnji. Who'll only suffer because of men all her life? Look at me! My mother loved me very much. She wanted so much for me… a house with electricity and water, shining brass vessels, a silver waist chain, silver anklets… and what have I got? No, no behnji, better to have a son." (28)

Guru Charan Behera's "The Multicoloured Patchwork Quilt: The Narrative Pattern in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*" is a pointer to the variety of themes that the novel deals with. Behera borrows a term from Deshpande's *That Long Silence* to sum up Deshpande's narrative pattern, "Like a 'multicoloured patchwork quilt', *That Long Silence* is a configuration of various stories, situations and various shades of experiences and feelings, reminiscences, fantasies, visions, imaginings and, above all, comments and reflections on life and literature, on the act of writing, particularly on women's writing.'[10] Behera considers Jaya a fictional representation of Deshpande herself and considers Deshpande's involvement with the work three dimensional. His opinion is that if Deshpande is involved with the work at the experiential level, she is detached as the narrator, and as the writer she is further detached in creating an artifact. Behera also brings to focus cinematic modes used by Deshpande. Behera's interest is also in discussing Deshpande's narrative punctuated by myths and folktales. It is in this practice of Deshpande that Behera finds the multiple-patchwork narrative mode. Behera points out that while these punctuations mirror the main theme, they do not merge with each other, yet are held together by the principle of mutuality.

***The Binding Vine***

*The Binding Vine* unfolds the stories of two women, both victims of rape, in two entirely different situations although. If Mira's is the case of rape within marriage, that of Kalpana is the case of an uncle's lust. The purpose of the novel is to question the compulsion of silence imposed on women because of social stigma. The enforced fortress of silence has its base shaking with Urmi's decision to write the story of Mira, her dead mother-in-law and Shakutai, Kalpana's mother's resolve not to remain silent. While the two stories run parallel, sensitively tackling the worst crime inflicted on women, the novel also revolves around the lives of various other women – Akka, Vanaa, Urmi, Inni, Shakutai, Sulu etc. The story of Mira remains the central one and her life is traced through the stages of being a young girl, who was pursued by a man relentlessly, loved by him determinedly, taken by him for a wife and used by him in the bed. Why did Mira succumb? Is it the outcome of her mother's advice? One of the poems penned down by Mira suggests the possibility:

> Don't tread paths barred to you
> Obey; never utter a 'no';
> Submit and your life will be
> A paradise, she said and blessed me.[11]

If Mira's story is pitiable, Akka's is no less heart-wrenching. After Mira's death, Akka is taken as the second wife, only to be a mother for the motherless child. Vanaa, Urmi's educated and employed sister-in-law, is an example of those women who constantly mould themselves according to the desire of their husbands. Her husband is an example of those men who can silently bend women in the direction of their will. Such men escape the title of chauvinism since they do not use obvious force. Yet, they succeed at making their women forget their personality and become emotionally dependent on them.

It is true that there are women who are content in such a set-up. Urmi's mother Inni can be labelled as an example of this. Yet, her relationship with her husband is not idyllic. Urmi's father metes out a cruel punishment to Inni by sending their little daughter Urmi to the grandparents' place when he feels that Inni is negligent towards the child. No amount of pleading on Inni's part makes him relent. His malevolent act brings about a rift in the mother-daughter relationship, never to be mended. The situation is reminiscent of Paulina Palmer's words, "... one of the effects of the pressure of a phallocentric culture and primacy given to male interests, is to promote patterns of deceit and breakdown of communication between mother and daughter."[12] (118)

The novel does not confine itself to the world of upper and middle class women alone. Shakutai and Sulu of the lower strata expose the other side of the coin which is no less grimy. Shakutai, who is abandoned by her husband and has no joy in married life, sets marriage as the ultimate goal for her daughters. Urmi understands that marriage is taken recourse to, because, for many women, the significance of marriage is being safe from the rest of men. The anguished cry of Shakutai after her daughter's rape is, "Why does God give us daughters?" (149) The general unwillingness of women to have daughters is the constant fear of sexual assault. That is why the dominant social realism of the novel remains the issue of male physical coercion into the female emotive world. Urmi's crusade is to give voice to those women cheated out of life. Urmi reflects, "They never had a chance. It's not fair at all. And we can't go on pushing it – what happened to them – under the carpet forever because we're afraid of disgrace." (149) However, Urmi herself is not in an ivory tower. Urmi's situation is comparable with that of quite a few hapless women who are left behind by their husbands whose professional aspirations make them disregard the frustration of their wives. Urmi says despairingly, "I often

wished I could put my desires into a deep freeze and take them out, intact and whole, when he returned." (83)

A.G. Khan hits the nail on its head while tracing the strains of sisterhood in the novel. He considers the work a projection of women's solidarity, female bonding and value of sisterhood in a male-dominated culture, the basis for their bonding being shared oppression and victimization. The idea that women are the enemies of women is questioned and the Reader Response Theory is used to show how literature is used as a subtle device to weaken women. Women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one whose central principle is misogyny. The obvious consequences of such conditioning result in nurturing misunderstandings about women and among women.

As pointed out by Khan, the motive of the novelist is undoubtedly the concept of 'sisterhood' or the concept of 'community of women'. When women come together and empathise with one another, the voice they raise against any and every form of injustice gets heard. The novel projects many endearing relationships. It is Vanaa, short form for Vandana, whom Urmi turns to in her moments of grief after losing her little daughter Anu. The picture of the two women, dwelling upon the joys of the past in their attempts at forgetting the pain of the present remains etched in the memory of the reader. There is the empathetic bond between Urmi, who has lost her daughter and Shakutai whose daughter has been raped. Urmi's personal loss acts as a catalyst in evoking her compassion for Shakutai. It is the same pain that equips Urmi with the ability to perceive the pain of Mira, her mother-in-law, who suffers rape in marriage. The common factor that runs through the lives of these three women, Urmi, Mira and Shakutai, from different backgrounds and different time-frames is the mute question, "Why does this have to

happen to me?" (67) The pain of being wronged binds the suffering women, culminating in their solidarity. For Shakutai, Urmi is like an oasis. Urmi's moral support arouses in Shakutai the courage to face society with the truth about what happened to her daughter Kalpana. From a woman who had dreaded public stigma and had pleaded with the doctors to change the records of the rape case into an accident case, Shakutai grows into a woman who is first of all concerned about the welfare of her daughter. She is prepared to break the silence and talk about the rape of her daughter if it is going to bring justice to her wronged daughter. It is this growth of Shakutai that can be termed empowerment. Deshpande shows that this empowerment is the result of neither constitutional amendments nor legislature, not even education and profession, but solidarity among women.

The novel has clear echoes of 'Consciousness Raising Groups' in the United States of the late sixties and early seventies. *Women Writing in India* describes how the groups used women's experience as a resource for critical discussion which in turn made it possible for women to share dimensions of their lives that they had earlier kept a secret or felt too insecure to confront or even recognise. Susie Tharu and Lalita K. write, "Groups encouraged women to focus on and articulate anger and dissatisfaction, and evolved through discussion new interpretations of their experience that questioned and rejected earlier modes of processing and making sense of what they had observed or felt."[13] The discussion resulted in solidarity among women and gave them new self-confidence and sense of power.

### *A Matter of Time*

Jasbir Jain's observation about Deshpande that, "Myth is interwoven into almost all her narratives, into her language, images and reference."[14] finds a fertile ground in *A*

*Matter of Time* with its bold questioning of the established practices and bolder rereading of myths. The blurb of Penguin publishers' *A Matter of Time* claims Deshpande to be "at her poignant best" in this novel. If one dismisses this as the glib reference of the publishers to raise the sales-pitch, one would be making a mistake. Deshpande undoubtedly moves the readers to an unmistakable sense of sorrow in this novel if it is only melancholy she evokes in her other earlier novels. The grief is of lost chances, of the realization that "there are no second chances"[15]. It is the dead who leave the living which includes the readers, with a sense of loss and injustice. Of the dead if Sumi is denied the chance of being "free", Sripathi misses the chance of being understood and "accepted". "Accepted" is the key word as the whole novel discards the idea of anyone being 'forgiven' or anyone 'forgiving'. Aru's enlightenment is this truth, "Forgiving she realizes has no place in this relationship; acceptance is all." (244) Kalyani's wry remark is, "We are all destined to do what we do." (246) This seemingly fatalistic attitude is in fact the enlightenment that Kalyani gets after a life-long suffering. It isn't the wisdom of seers and prophets, but the knowledge a woman gets from life. This foresight is available even to totally illiterate women and Nagi stands as an example of this. In her case we see that pain and injustice are swallowed with the simple philosophy, "Some people are like that." (179) This universal acceptance, almost mechanical in utterance, is the philosophy women work out for themselves so that life is bearable.

However, neither acceptance nor forgiveness allows the guilty to go scot free. Gopal is answerable to Aru's probing. Even the cold legal system has humane angles and corners him to the position of the guilty. As Surekha, the lawyer says, "If your emotions damage some one else, the law takes account of that." (213) Yet the sordid truth remains that whether it is the outcome of existential absurdity as in the case of Gopal, or the feeling of nemesis as in the case of Sripathi, men desert women as if it were the order of

the day and the word 'again' in the response of Kalyani, on knowing Sumi's desertion by Gopal is indicative of it. "No," she cries out, "no, my God, not again." (12)

The novel, like all other earlier novels of Deshpande, revolves around women and keeps men in the periphery allowing them to take centre-stage only occasionally. The novel, again like every other novel of Deshpande, speaks of the tenuous web of human relationships in spite of featuring every human being as essentially alone. Despite moments of alienation, which every individual is destined to suffer from at different moments in life, there are times when people draw sustenance from and give sustenance to one another. The bond could be between husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, sisters and cousins, benefactors and beneficiaries, or business contacts and chance acquaintances. The bonding takes place unless one shuts oneself up as Sripathi does. Even here there is a fact to be reckoned with. Although Sripathi's inner self remains as shadowy as the shadowy figure Aru sees and recognizes as her Grandfather's while running a temperature, the hand on her forehead is real.

If Sripathi's alienation is the outcome of a personal tragedy, Gopal's is a defence mechanism in order to avoid any such tragedy. It is the inexplicable fear that relationships would sooner or later end in inexorable pain that makes him snap the ties before the inevitable. He naively believes that the act of freeing himself would also give to his close ones the privilege of being free. But that he is wrong is the realization that comes to him only later. He ruminates, "... I cannot escape. What had I expected, that I could inflict pain and feel none in return?" (49) Perhaps, only after the death of Sumi the truth of Kierkegaard's words, "Life must be lived forward, but it can only be understood backwards," (98) must have dawned upon him. Ironically, even after alienating himself from Sumi, it is only with Sumi that he feels at ease. At Devaki's party, if he is bored

with everyone else, Sumi is the only person he would like to converse with. Yet it is from Sumi he unceremoniously turns away! According to him, his action is the outcome of his ability to see through the untruth or half truth of life. He understands the wisdom in the words of Yudhishtira who answers Yaksha with the observation that the greatest wonder in this world is that we go on with life as if we were going to live forever even when we see people dying all around us. Somehow we hope to escape the pain. This is the secret and essence of life. But, if at an unexpected moment, like Prince Sidharth, we realize the emptiness, then we are doomed. However, unlike Sidharth who could fill the emptiness by showing compassion for humanity, ordinary people would suffer from existential absurdity. It is necessary to note that this theme of the impermanence of the body pitted against the permanence of life and soul is taken up more perspicuously and perspicaciously in Deshpandes's later novel, *Moving on.*

*The Matter of Time* also raises the question whether the widespread urban alienation is the root cause of an individual's sense of rootlessness. Gopal's fear psychosis after being bashed up by his own students who face no resistance or interference from anyone and Sumi's horrifying vision of the two figures bending over her to see whether she is alive after an accident, only to walk away without offering help are instances of urban apathy and alienation.

The connection between urban alienation and individual predicament is brought out more pointedly through another episode. Strangely, respite from sorrow after Sumi's death comes unexpectedly to the family in the event of a larger calamity – the assassination of the young Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. Kalyani asks incredulously, "Such a young man – how could anyone have hated him so much! Can people hate so

much?" A little later she further wonders, "How will our children live in this world Gopala? Where did we go wrong? What have we done to them?" (241 – 42)

The novel presents family bonding as an answer to the problem of isolation and alienation. "There was a time when a man could have walked out of his home and the seamless whole of the joint family would have enclosed his wife and children." (13) But even the present set-up, Deshpande shows, is not totally despondent. Aru will always have in her vision the fairy tale figure of the man who helped her reach the destination when she was lost in an unknown place, in addition to lending her a jerkin, getting soaked himself. The jerkin, forgotten at the end of the journey, remains with Aru as a testimony to the innate goodness of human beings. The warm reception Giridhar and his family offer Kalyani, who is a pretty old chapter in their lives, shows that connections don't die. Gopal's visit to his old master can be connected to the fact that it is with the help of Shankar, his student, that he begins his life of a recluse. The constant attempts of different people to relate and reach out indicate that community values still exist. Kalyani, the perpetually wronged woman, wronged by her mother and wronged by her husband, is catapulted into the realization of the beauty of a family when her grand daughter tells her compassionately, "Amma, I'm here, I'm your daughter, Amma, I'm your son, I'm here with you, Amma, I'm here…." (233) Sumi's impulsive act of putting a hand on Manju's arm, which Manju remembers even after Sumi's death, explicates the idea that even between chance acquaintances a bond can be forged. Goda, Kalyani's confidante; Ramesh, the ever-caring brother of Gopal; Devaki and Premi, the good Samaritans; Surekha, the bawdy lawyer; and even the uncouth broker are soothing entities in the rigmarole of human relationships.

Intricately interwoven with these humanist concerns are Deshpande's feminist concerns. That she manages to do it smoothly without any sign of straining, is a proof of her artistry as a writer. But she leaves the readers with no doubts about the presence of these concerns. One of her female protagonists (for they keep changing) Aru is on the verge of becoming an active feminist and quite surprisingly the other protagonist, Kalyani, is the one who approves of her move wholeheartedly. One wonders whether it is the same Kalyani who used to put her hand on her younger daughter Premi's mouth whenever she was loud so that the man upstairs, her husband, wouldn't be disturbed! One is surprised that it is the same Kalyani who had silently accepted her abandonment at the railway station with two young daughters by her husband. The writer's admiration for this woman is unsullied.

Deshpande gently pokes fun at the reservations society still has against feminism as an ideology. Gopal, a progressive man, hesitates before asking Surekha whether she is a feminist. Surekha mildly scoffs at him by saying that he could go ahead and say the word which was after all not a four-letter word. Caught in a period of transition women like Kalyani cannot stand up for themselves. Aru, with the impatience of the young and privileged, cannot understand her grandmother's predicament. Initially she is impatient with her grandmother and her annoyance is evident in her outburst, "She should have stood up for herself."(143) But this impatience is later replaced by a deep sense of admiration and affection. Kalyani's feelings are reciprocal. It is only to Aru that Kalyani indirectly admits that she is hurt. "You can't stop living because someone else has got hurt." Aru's reply is, "No, Amma but I can take care that I don't get hurt the same way." (198) It is hurt that perhaps makes every woman say wistfully, "When I was a girl...." (120) as if 'that girl' is the real her. Yet, Sumi, despite her hurt, does not want Aru to begin her life with antipathy towards men. Sumi knows that thinking of every man as a

scoundrel would be an unhealthy attitude. She manages to maintain this balance even as she witnesses around her instances of male atrocity such as an AIDS patient getting married in spite of knowing that he has the deadly disease so as to have a woman to take care of him. Thus, Sumi who has neither the rigidity of Kalyani nor the ambivalence of Aru, seems to be the writer's spokeperson for healthy feminism. However, the novelist has unequivocal respect for women of forbearance like Kalyani. "...the real miracle is Kalyani herself. Kalyani who has survived intact – in spite of what Sripathi did to her. Kalyani who has survived Manorama's myriad acts of cruelty." (151) That is why, the final message is in Sumi's pondering, "Will Aru learn that love, however brief, however unsatisfactory, however tragic, is necessary? Will she realize that without that kind of a companionship some part of us withers and dies?" (169) The character of Yamunabai is introduced to further explicate the novelist's concern for women. Yamunabai's vision is explained as, "...girls and women would not have to live with nothing more in their lives than the slavery of endless drudgery and child bearing... In other words, education was the tool with which she would work for the realization of her dream." (187) Likewise, Sureka's character is introduced to focus on the aspect of women and law. "You are lucky," she tells Aru, "to be living now. Do you know Manu doesn't mention any duty to maintain a daughter? The duty is only towards a wife, parents, and sons." (204)

The patterns of patriarchy are further questioned with reference to the universal preference for a male child from Bethlehem to Jamuna. There is a mention, although a passing one, to women having no place in the history of the Marathas. There is a more serious note of concern on the history being a construct.

The novel is also profusely interspersed with the rereading of many a fable and fairy tale with a clear slant towards feminism. In fact the novel can be studied

exclusively with these re-readings as one's focus. However, the one, which the author herself chooses as the most important, is the story of "The Gardener's Son". Unlike Kalyani who meekly submits to the will of her mother, forgetting the man who sent her love letters, the princess manages to marry the gardener's son by plotting to have him as the winner in identifying the 'rice and curds' tree. Sumi sees in the princess, "A clever young woman, anyway, who used a man's own weapons against him." (157) But the story doesn't end here. The novelist admits that there is the fear that the gardener's son himself will shut his wife out of power. Whether the wife will be able to find a weapon against her husband remains a mute point. The novelist wryly says that just as Bhavabhuthi in the *Uttaramacharithra* made a U turn and gave a happy ending; she too would end the story happily. The satirical edge is unmistakable. Deshpande makes it clear that the happy endings of the folk tales are a myth.

The novel also has a more daring re-reading of Shoorpanaka. Deshpande deals with the question of female sexuality by rereading the story of Shoorpanaka from a feminist angle. Her approach here is reflective of the move of the women writers of the 1980s and 1990s who questioned the literary censorship that silenced women's desire. In post colonial women's writing, the theme of sexuality revolves around the themes of women's body, women's personal relationships and their sexual identity. If it was Kamala Das who made the first move towards this feminist mode, we see in the writings of Deshpande ample mapping of women's desires. *The Dark Holds No Terrors, The Binding Vine* and *Small Remedies* show no duality in dealing with the subject of female sexuality. While shunning the idea of female sexuality, concurrently, women are caught in the notion of 'Shakti' in the Hindu tradition, effectively erasing the female sexuality in favour of purity. But as Nemichandra, a Kannada critic has pointed out, there seems to be two notions of purity as far as men and women are concerned. In the case of men, if it is

the question of integrity in character, in the case of women, it is virginity. The resultant trend is that while women are caught in the double bind of both pure character and chastity, men are free of the imposition of the latter. This explains why we do not have a masculine equivalent to the term chastity.

While rereading the story of Draupadi, Deshpande exposes another facet of female sexuality, and this time it is the question of unwanted sex in marriage. If Draupadi's disguise as Sairandhri, the queen's maid, is taken as her attempts to be by herself, to sleep alone, to be free of her five husbands at least for a while, Arjuna's disguise as Brihannale is viewed as respite from the world of war and violence by becoming an insider in the gentle world of women.

As suggested by the title 'Conceptual Blending and Narratives: Cognitive Perspectives on Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*' Liza Das and Merry Baruah analyse Deshpande's cognitive approach, which shows the author as a real person, in real time, embrained and embodied in a physical self, as well as embedded in the specificities of her cultures. Their paper seeks to contribute to the burgeoning field of cognitive narratology with the contention that an important model developed in Cognitive Science, Conceptual Blending, has not yet been fully explored as a methodological tool in the scientific study of narratives. In the process they discuss Deshpande's stand on myths:

> ...myths are both necessary and relevant to human lives, they come out of same human need...We are looking for a fresh knowledge of ourselves in them, trying to discover what is relevant to our lives today. We don't reject the ideals, but we know we can't approximate to these pictures of ideal womanhood. And we will not bear any guilt that we cannot do so. More important than knowing what we are not is to know what we are, what is possible for us.[16]

*In The Matter of Time,* Deshpande's tool is mainly rereading myths. Along with the intense introspective mode, there is also the employment of the strategy of rereading myths to bring women's issues to centre stage.

Vijay Guttal sees postcolonial discourses in *The Binding Vine* and *A Matter of Time.* Guttal summarises the postcolonial discourse as an act of rereading and an approach that offer us different perspectives on issues related to colonialism. The novels as critical concepts recover resistance of various kinds and attempt to explain the presence of the silenced voice in any dominant discourse making it possible to tease out various readings of the textual narrative. Postcolonial criticism draws attention to issues of cultural differences in literary texts and focuses on issues of gender, class and caste. It is in this context of post colonialism that Guttal views Deshpande's works as strategies of representation for empowerment. He considers these two later novels diversification from the theme of self-realization to the theme of community of women with a common heritage of oppression.

***Small Remedies***

Meenakshi Mukherjee sees in Deshpande the special value of uncompromising toughness in the insistence on being read on her own terms and refusal to be packaged according to the demands of the market. Mukherjee is right because *Small Remedies* is at once similar to and different from the other novels of Shashi Deshpande. Deshpande continues with her stream of consciousness narrative technique and the first person narrative style. Her interest in the subject of human relationships continues unabated. The narrator Madhu, her ideal Leela, her biography's protagonist Bai and a host of other women - Latha, Hasina and Rekha make the novel feminine if not feminist. The male characters - Madhu's doctor father, her husband Som, their friend Chandru, Bai's lover

Gulam Saab, Leela's husband Joe, Rekha's husband Tony, Latha's husband Hari act as the balancing factor in making the novel sensitive to the world of men too. The philosophical ruminations, as in other novels, make the piece an astounding repository of insight and wisdom. Deshpande's Frostian ability to use the mundane to understand the profound continues to have free play in this work too. The poetics of grief which Deshpande uses as a girdle around the plot ceases not in *Small Remedies* either. In fact, it tightens because the narrator Madhu has lost her only son Adit in communal clashes. The novel tries to ponder over the questions, "How can life be made more bearable? How can one move on?" Despite all these recurring motif and technique, *Small Remedies* has a stamp of its own. Each character leaves the readers with an indelible impression and each philosophical observation unravels before the reader a world of knowledge.

One of the thematic concerns raising its head every now and then is the question of the importance of words, "Nada Brahma Swara Ishwara. The sound is Brahma, the note is God. The sound and the note – the beginning of the world. And the word? What about it?"[17] *Small Remedies* explores the world of words to arrive at truths. The truth that the reader is led to is that words offer only half truths. When they offer truth and only truth, the outcome is devastating.

Madhu, the protagonist, who faces the cataclysmic effect of speaking the truth, is on another voyage of truth in writing the biography of Savitribai Indroreker. Madhu is aware that she has three possibilities – the story that Savitribai wants to place before the world, the story that publishers want and the story Madhu herself wants to write. Madhu is clear about one truth. She doesn't want another book of deception as the one she wrote in the case of Hamidbai, her employer of yesteryears. Even as she gropes in the dark trying to find her way in the world of words, she realizes that the only way out is to write

the book from the angle of Savitri Bai's honesty. Viewing the issue from this angle, Madhu is able to consider the possibility of Savitri Bai being neglected by her daughter Munni instead of Munni being neglected by her.

In her voyage as biographer, Madhu also hits upon the truth that words, as shown by Latha, build relationships and have value. The power of words is summarized in the observation, "If we think we can influence people for the worse, why can't we believe they can be influenced for good?" (309) The proof of this is provided when Hasina's programme goes uninterrupted in the temple and the credit is given to the article written by Madhu.

Intricately woven into the personal is the political. The death of Adi is an irrevocable tragedy and evokes pathos by bringing in the idea that both the parents think that they are responsible for the death of their only son. Pitted against this private sorrow is the question of the senseless slaughter of fellow human beings and the colossal waste of human lives in the riots that followed the demolition of Babri Masjid. To point out that these incidents are neither initiated nor controlled by the majority of masses, the novel uses the plot of Hasina, Gulab Saab's grand daughter and disciple of Bai singing in the temple of Goddess Bhavani. The Devi Strotra and Akka Mahadevi's Vachana rendered flawlwssly by Hasina present music as the power that overrides the barriers of caste and community.

The plot brings in the stories of the struggle of the communist Leena, artiste Savitri Bai and writer Madhu. It is Leena's arena that is political, but there is gender politics in Savitri Bai's struggle to establish herself as a singer.

As Madhu tries to read Savitri Bai's life, layer by layer, a curt, ambitious woman is replaced by a woman who tries to follow her instinct and make sense of her life and

moves on even at the cost of emotionally losing her only daughter. If Madhu herself, a grieving mother, can move on, it is the outcome of the lesson she has learnt from Savitri Bai who is almost on the verge of death. Madhu, who had cursed the ability of the human mind to remember and relive the pain of the past, has the enlightenment that it is memory that makes life worth living. As far as people live in our memories they are not really dead. It is this enlightenment that makes it possible for her to ultimately accept Adit's death and go back to Som to share his grief and start on life's journey all over again.

As in other novels, in this novel too Deshpande tries to downplay the importance given to the question of purity in terms physicality. Tony, who had lunged at Madhu and had tried to fondle her in his youthful days, later turns out to be a self-declared brother. Madhu, who had slapped him spontaneously, has no rancour at all towards him later on. Both can easily forget the incident as the uncontrolled, natural libido of the male. But the same does not happen with Madhu's revelations to Som about her sleeping with a man years before her marriage. She bemoans, "Purity, chastity, an intact hymen – these are the things Som is thinking of, these are the truths that matter." (262) The purely instinctive, physical act of a young girl finding solace in the physical contact of a reassuring male in the time of bereavement torments Som to the extent of doubting Madhu's relationship with even Tony. The fact that the man who had slept with Madhu commits suicide shows that he too considered the act defilement of an innocent girl, barely fifteen. Madhu for whom the act was a closed chapter shocks Som by explaining that she hadn't referred to the matter as she had forgotten it until her memory was raked up by a painting in an exhibition organized by Rekha. Madhu can't comprehend how Som can allow the past to destroy years of marriage. Chandru's words that men and women can never be friends haunt her. But she is not angry; she understands Som's pain; she would like to help; but she doesn't k now how. But when human beings are up against the wall, life opens up

with new possibilities. Som wants Madhu to go back to him and the novel ends with the idea of the two sharing their pain and memory.

As far as grief is concerned, the novel shows that none can escape its noose. Even a happy go lucky girl like Lata has her moments of poignant grief. Grief is all pervasive as shown by Kisa Goutami's story. Yet as long as people reach out to one another and communicate with words, all will be well. Deshpande shows in this novel once again the power of the family. When Madhu loses her father, her aunt Leela rushes to her help; Latha and Hari rally around Madhu because they know that she is family; Munni's paternal family accepts her and offers her the much hankered after respectability despite the knowledge that she is the fruit of sin; Tony arrantly loves his sister, Paula.

Even as family has natural bonding, it is possible for people without blood ties too to create a close-knit unit. We see that happening with Madhu at different times. When she starts living on her own, Chandru, Tony and Som substitute for the missing links of the family. Savithri Bai, as an old and decrepit woman, waits eagerly for Madhu's visits and Hasina has a special place in her heart for Madhu. Thus, human relations can create families and bind people. In this Madhu's model is Latha. Madhu says of Latha, "She needs to be constantly communicating with others, through words, through touch." (40 – 41) For Latha, relationships pose no problems because she is adept at, "...handling out random slices of her life to the other person wholly ignoring the spaces between them, explaining nothing." (40)

Intertextuality abounds in the novel and Deshpande's characters effortlessly cruise from Dickens to Brontes, from the *Katha Pusthak* to the movie, *My Name is Antony Gonsalves*. The title *Small Remedies* is based on a book by the same title although the latter is full of tips about dealing with a baby's minor problems. Tragically, when the

baby is no more, no book can offer remedies to the pain of Madhu. People hover over her hoping to ease her pain. They visit her with food thinking it can help. Yet none of these small remedies helps. The only remedy is the remedy of the passing time. The line, "In the life of one man never the same time returns" from *Murder in the Cathedral* gives the bereaving mother the realization that time moves on relentlessly and one has to go along with it. Along with this is also the enlightenment, "It's not just living children who need to be free, the dead clamour for release as well." (323)

Thus, Deshpande's leit motif of positivism marks the ending of *Small Remedies* too. Deshpande's message is simple. It is reflected in the blessings she confers on the *vatu* whose *upanayanam* she has witnessed. She doesn't utter the usual blessing, *chirayu bhava*, which means 'live long'. As the mother, who has lost her only son, she knows the ineffectual nature of the vow against the hand of fate. She utters the words *sukhi bhava* which means 'be happy'. This is what Som's father used to say and Madhu now has the understanding that happiness is something we can hope to have some control over.

It is true that *Small Remedies* has a large canvas and lends itself to diverse interpretations as indicated by the focus taken by different critics. Bijay Danta considers the novel a work that often recoils on itself, the recoiling being structured into a repetition of memory and mimesis in a manner that challenges authority. Usha Bande shows how questioning and resistance are considered a menace to authority because both pose threat to dominant ideology. Bande's conclusion, that these two novels are resistant texts that transcend the mundane and finally reconcile with the ultimate reality, is a loaded one. Bande is of the opinion that the author poses a problem, questions it, fights it and then works towards acceptance and reconciliation. By doing this, Bande feels, Deshpande suggests that there is no easy solution to life's existential problems and the choice before

us is limited. However, the ultimate message of both the novels, despite their grimness is of optimism.

Thus, we see that in novel after novel, Deshpande studies the private lives of women comprising sexual relations, marriage children and domestic violence, analysing the very question of the treatment of women in our culture. When it comes to the question of violence against women, her studies range from battering of women at home to rape within the four walls of home and outside it. Rape is not merely a sex drive, but the male urge to control and dominate women.

**A Study of *Moving on* as a Polyphonic Novel**

Chanchala K. Naik finds in *Moving on* a complex narrative structure that embodies several strands, using memory, experience and written texts, the diaries of a deceased, in a palimpsest self-history that is layered and entangled in a filial drama. Her essay '*Moving on*: In Search of Individual Autonomy and Self-Realization', finds in the novel, Deshpande's argument for relational autonomy. She explains the term relational autonomy as that which reconceptualises autonomy from a feminist perspective and understands an individual as a social and cultural product, embodied and embedded in relationships with others in specific social, political and historical contexts. Relational feminists argue that the concept of the independent, autonomous, impersonal ideal of the separate and autonomous self of woman betrays a masculine denial or repression of the original relationship with and dependence upon the mother. This has become the basis of a counter-discourse that pleads 'impersonal', 'objective', 'disinterest', 'public', male ideal and a 'personal', 'subjectivity', 'implanted', 'private' female experience. Relational autonomy focuses on 'female' experience; and as a concept is mediation between the assertion and rejection of the ideal of autonomy, a sort of intermediary position between

the two and is a way out of the paralyzing impasse at the core of feminist theory and practice. It is a reformulated conception of autonomy that does not conflict with women's 'embededness' and 'embodiment' and also does not stand against their continually reaffirming of freedom of thought, choice, and action in a gendered society, in their everyday personal and political struggle. After having explained the term, Chanchala K. Naik concludes that *Moving on* is a fictional narrative perhaps placed in the 'in-between space' of relational autonomy.

One sees that *Moving on* is a work that has decisively moved beyond feminist concerns to uphold humanism. Despite her repeated refusal to be recognised as a feminist, Deshpande could never shake off the label. Even Jasbir Jain, who finds fault with other critics for their penchant for trying to typecast Deshpande as a feminist, avers about Deshpande:

> All her novels to date work through a feminine consciousness,... There is no attempt at selecting a male protagonist but equally there is no attempt at focusing only on feminine perspective. Women narrators transcend their gender in order to explore the male psyche and avoid stereotypical projections of patriarchal structures. Their inbuilt compulsions are presented with compassion and understanding.[18]

But in *Moving on* Deshpande has undoubtedly moved on from a single female protagonist to multi-protagonists, inclusive of both male and female voices. Thus, it is imperative that the novel is studied as a rich example of a polyphonic novel.

Graham Allen in his *Intertextuality* writes:

> A polyphonic novel is one in which several different voices or points of view interact on more or less equal terms'... It demonstrates and celebrates the dialogic nature of society by presenting a vision of human society dominated by the dialogue and play between views and utterances...That which is polysemous has many meanings or significations. Employed within poststructuralist theory as a way of resisting traditional notions of the singularity of meaning and thus of texts and signs. [19]

'Polyphony', 'polysemy', 'dialogism', 'heteroglossia' and 'carnival' are terms used by Bakhtin to refer to the multiple voices in a text as opposed to the single, unquestionable, authorial voice. Roland Barthes posits 'paradoxa' as opposed to 'doxa' wherein 'paradoxa' represents anything which is contrary to common opinion and 'doxa' constitutes general opinion, or is at any one moment in society considered unquestionable or natural. Julia Kristeva through her terms 'genotext' and 'phenotext' discusses 'polyphony' and 'polysemy'. Phenotexts which attempt to produce clear and unequivocal meaning are opposed to the polyphonic nature of genotexts which are resistant to social standards of communication, breaking stylistic and linguistic conventions.

The common thread running through all these dialectics is the deconstructive approach of Derrida which is critical of ideas of stable and authoritative meaning. The works of contemporary writers, positioned amidst all these polyphonic critical thoughts, turn out to be dialogic in nature. In many texts of the avant-garde writers, the speaker replaces the author and very often many speakers replace a single speaker. The multiple speakers make the work polyphonic.

Shashi Deshpande's *Moving on* is a typical polyphonic novel. That the author does it consciously is explicit in the novel itself. Baba, who can be considered the male protagonist, tells his daughter Jiji through his writings that like the *Mahabharata* their lives too are not a story authored by a single author. He avers that if the *Mahabharata* has the whole of human existence within it, it is because it is not the story written by one person and has something for everyone. Baba writes, "One person's picture will always remain incomplete, always lacking. So will this account of mine be flawed. And yet it helps."[20]

The flawed account of Baba is set right when Jiji's account complements or completes Baba's. Jiji's account is set into motion, in the first place, by Baba's. At the very outset, in 'Baba's Diary' we see Baba trying to understand his dead father with the minimal references his father had made to his past. Baba, an anatomist, compares his attempt to what an anatomist does professionally, i.e. identifying a human being through the bones. What the novelist suggests here is that human beings are available to others only in their skeletal self. They are not, at any point of time, revealed fully in all their flesh and blood. It is this partial view that leads to many a problem and strife in human relationships. Yet, if one tries, as Baba does, it is possible to get a fuller view, a better understanding of others and it is in this attempt that the essence of life lies.

Baba who had initially thought that bones could give him complete knowledge of a human being's age, sex, race and gender later realizes that a human being's knowledge of himself and others cannot be in isolation. "The whole potential of who we are and what we are is realized only through our relationships with others." (56)

Years ago he had laughed at his dissection partner's belief that affinity between two people depended on their star signs. Years later he realizes that the ideal relationship

is the one in which people bring out the best in each other as in the case of Baba's sister Gayathri and her husband R.K. It is now clear to Baba that his relationship with Vasu was flawed. Baba, who never believed in fate or destiny but relied on knowledge, reason and the people he loved, has his own take on flawed relationships. His conviction is, "If ultimately it didn't work out, it was not because these things failed me, it was because I failed them." (59) Baba is aware that somewhere, somehow he had gone wrong while Gayathri hadn't disintegrated. Baba's conclusion is strengthened by Jiji who has a similar thought. We see her muse, "Why is it that Baba gave up so completely, while Gayathri managed to keep going?" (159) She answers her own question by saying, "Gayathri never let her connections to other human beings die out, she kept them intact and alive." (160) This is one of the many instances when we see Jiji complementing Baba's narration.

Like Baba, Jiji too is on a path of discovery. Just as Baba tries to know his father, Jiji tries to know Baba. Surprisingly her hesitation about reading the diary is put to rest when a character in a TV soap remarks that people will always remain incomplete without knowing their parents. For Jiji this is a moment of epiphany - enlightenment. She realizes that though Baba was communicating with himself through the diary, the information contained was for Jiji. As in speaking, even in writing there is a need for a partner. Otherwise the exercise is futile and knowledge cannot be passed on. Deshpande seems to suggest that in any writing, the discovery of truth is a conjoined effort between the writer and the reader. The truth, therefore, can be different from reader to reader making any and every piece of writing polyphonic.

The two main voices of the novel, thus, are available through the characters of Baba and his daughter Jiji. If the narrative mode of Baba is in the form of a diary, that of Jiji is the stream of consciousness method.

Baba's entries in the diary are highly philosophical. The constant endeavour is to come to terms with the impermanence of the body. The question that plagues Baba after his father's death is the startling truth that all of us 'live' even while being fully aware that 'death' is certain. How is it possible for human beings to escape the absurdity of such an existence? Baba finds an answer in an analogy. Just as astronomers, with their love for knowledge goading them on, take up the task of understanding man's position in the universe even when they know that their discovery will only lead to revelations about man's insignificance in the universe, man lives his life even when death is certain. And hence life, Baba concludes using Galileo's words – moves on – Eppur si muove.

However, Baba continues to be baffled while trying to decipher the permanence of life through the impermanence of the body. Baba's faith in the perfection of the human body is shaken on two grounds after his wife, Vasu's death. He cannot digest the fact that with death all the energy that life once was ceases to be. The scientific idea that matter does not cease to exist as well as the philosophical idea of "Tat tvam asi Svetaketu," (111) – the body as only the outer covering of the essence within it, in the story of Svetaketu in Upanishads is at the basis of Baba's faith about the permanence of life. But the impermanence or shallowness of human relationships and Vasu's willingness to put an end to her body trouble him. It was as though she had planned a strike of her organs. He is also shocked by the dichotomy, between the body and the mind in Vasu's case. Vasu, on a rare occasion, after having matched his passion with her own, had seemed to be ashamed of herself.

Baba who is passionate about the human body is confounded by these experiences. However, he is able to perceive the superiority of human race in terms of

knowledge. Dr. Kapadia's words that knowledge which is available to the human race through language and memory as opposed to the instinct of animals; put his mind to rest.

In this light, writing and speaking, the two components of language gain significance. It also explains why Baba feels light every time he lectures to students or puts down his thoughts in the diary. Baba explains his own act of writing the diary as an act erupting out of the impulse that all of us try to understand what happened to us and our origins. But then writing can have different 'signs'. In the case of Vasu, writing is a foil to the truth. She did not want to be pinned down to the truth by giving it finality through words. She covered it with frills like the Victorian novelists. Baba sees through the gimmick and understands that writers use writing as a foil. When Dickens idealized love and marriage, he did so fully aware of their falsity and his cynicism is apparent in his novel *Bleak House* in which he describes a suspicious wife as bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, shadow of his shadow. But Baba is able to glimpse this cynical edge only after having experienced the shallowness of human relationships. But then the signs needn't be the same for another person. Thus the novel makes references through the writings of Baba that writing is polyphonic in nature and multiple interpretations are possible.

Baba draws parallels between writing and living and points out that unlike a new story which gives to its writer the chance of a rebirth, life doesn't answer the question, "What next?" The body is a brief loan and once the body ceases to be, what remains is a bewildering question. For theists faith is the answer. What would help people who believe only in the reality of life? This time Baba's realization is that it is our ability to find happiness and to let go of grief that will make it possible for us to live life

meaningfully even without knowing what awaits us after death. Happiness sets one free while grief shackles one to the past.

These philosophical ruminations of Baba encapsulated in the diary are intermingled with his daughter Jiji's intense retrospection and introspection. Speaking about her father's fascination for the human body and his inability to see it in any way as defective, Jiji remembers Raja's words. As an architect Raja is shrewd enough to understand that if people don't complain about the defects in their homes, it is simply because they have grown attached to it and refuse to accept that their possession could fall short of perfection in anyway. Likewise for Baba, a bone doctor, the human body is perfect and when there is a deformity in the body, it is only indicative of the fault in the execution and not in the plan itself. It was this fascination that made him adorn, to the horror of his wife, a wall in his house with a skeleton which he called Mr. Bones.

Jiji who shares her father's fascination for the human body is equally confounded by it. In her case what troubles her more than the imperfection or the impermanence of the body is the dichotomy between the body and the mind. After a dream sequence Jiji finds her body aroused, but the mind is repulsed by the fact that the body is aroused. The dichotomy troubles Jiji relentlessly. It is surprising that Jiji who was embarrassed when Raja took her hands in his in the presence of her son Anand reacts differently when Raman clutches her hand. In the case of Raja if it is the mind that acts, in the case of Raman it is the body. But unless there is a fusion between the two, relationships remain flawed. With Raja, Jiji is totally at ease and can speak to him about menopause and the desire of a colleague to sleep with her. But physical contact, may be because of childhood memories, is taboo. Moreover, Raja's absence in her life when she was a mature woman makes her associate with him only as a childhood friend. About the great expanse

between Raja and her, she concludes that she had left Raja, "... behind in that childhood playground of ours." (191) With Raman it is only the body. That is why even when the body is satisfied, the mind is restive. The act of sex with no caresses, no words spoken, remains unnatural and unfulfilled.

Just as she had rules for Raman to inhabit the room, she has a new set of rules for him to inhabit her body. Though Jiji is aware that her starved body needs sex, the mind continues to be troubled. Jiji says, "Like drinking water when you are thirsty. Like a diabetics craving for food. Nothing wrong with it. And yet why do I bathe three times a day, why do I scrub myself when bathing as if I want to flay myself, why do I punish my body so angrily?" (260) She continues, "Nature has done this badly. How can you want the act and hate the idea so much? Why am I ashamed of what I'm doing?" (260). From these muddled responses of Jiji, it is clear that if the body represents nature, the mind stands for culture. It is not easy to escape cultural determinations. Since society hasn't yet started approving of such arrangements between women in need of sex and men who are willing to give it to them, women themselves cannot overcome the feelings of guilt. It is in her relationship with Shyam that there is the fusion of the mind and the body. Mai, who detested the body and the desires of the body to the extent of keeping them outside the precincts of her writing except for traditional descriptions of the beauty of the heroine as milk-white-skin or liquid eyes, is aghast at Jiji's openness about the yearnings of her body. She contemptuously rejects Jiji's love for Shyam as the confusion of the body. The fact that until then Jiji had gone unnoticed as a girl and hence found Shyam's interest in her captivating seems to support Mai's view. But then, in Jiji's case it is a different reality all together. The entry of Shyam is the opening of the flood gates of romance for Jiji and unlike Baba, Shyam is able to talk to her about the passions and beauty of the body. This

is where Baba had failed. The truth is presented in his own words, "I sometimes think I failed Vasu in this that my love took too much the route of the body." (204)

Thus, we see that the novel which is from neither an entirely male perspective nor a singularly female view point celebrates humanism escaping the hegemony of patriarchy and parochialism of feminism. This in itself would suffice to establish the dialogism of the novel. Yet the novel's polyphonic nature is evident in another way too. In the narratives of the two protagonists, the views of many other characters are heard. These characters may take centre-stage or remain in the periphery, but their views are vocalized. Very often voices silenced in one narrative are vocalized in the other or views which are not listened to at one stage of human experience are heard at another.

The characters of Mai and Laxman are striking examples of this feature of the novel. In fact Mai is Mai only in Jiji's narration and Vasu in Baba's and their narrations expose to the readers different selves of the same woman. Laxman, who is abhorred by Baba as a criminal, is viewed with greater sympathy by Jiji. Baba himself has moments of doubt and conflicting emotions in his references to Vasu and Laxman at different stages in life.

Baba who is passionately in love with Vasu and seems to be under her spell, in reality, has his own way with her and it is Vasu who has to concede to his demands. Vasu, who never enjoyed her outings with BK and his family, has no respite from them because of Baba's insistence. Since it is her voice which is decisive with children, it leads to the illusion that Vasu is in complete control of the family. Baba who expects his wife to enjoy his friend BK's company has no qualms in severing ties with Laxman, Vasu's criminal brother, knowing fully well that the act would deeply hurt Vasu. Even in the case of Vasu's writing career, Baba is guilty. The novel focuses on the inner space that is

not available to women writers. Jiji questions, "How did she, a shopkeeper's daughter who had not gone to school begin to write?" (125) If the reference here is to education, there is again reference to unending demands on women writers as mothers. Jiji says, "Years that wiped out the writer because she was wiping our noses, Malu's and mine, wiping our bottoms (with her face turned away) feeding us, dressing us." (122) Baba admits at one point of time that he was wrong in his response to his wife as a writer. He remarks, "I took it for granted that the only writing table we had was for me to work." (197) For Vasu it was always the dinner table which could be used only after being cleaned. Baba adds, "I had … no compunctions about disturbing her when she was working." (197) He confesses that he had looked at Vasu's writing on women, love, marriage and home as mediocre. He is contrite that he hadn't offered Vasu solace after she was incisively criticized by critics. Mai who was popular with her dishonest stories becomes the target of inimical criticism when her short story 'Black Out' is published. The plot of the story revolves around the time of the Bangladeshi war and the act of switching on the light in a Muslim Mohalla is viewed as treachery by the self-appointed guardians of the Mohalla. The woman, who switches on the light, pretends innocence when questioned and instructs the rioters to question her husband. It is only after the husband is assaulted by the rioters that the reader learns about the bruises on the body of the woman and it is only when the woman goes to bed thinking, "I can sleep tonight," (174) does the reader realize the trick played by the woman.

The novel deals with the concept of evil too in a polyphonic manner. The delineation of the character of Laxman, Vasu's brother, who is an underworld don, is indicative of this. The split nature of the text is such that it makes multiple meanings possible as it operates at semeiotic and symbolic levels.

When Jiji is threatened in her own house, she contemplates over how property has mattered in the case of both the famous and the infamous. Mythology and history have shown that property mattered in the case of Duryodhana, Alexander, Napoleon and Hitler. Jiji's uncle Laxman was no exception. But the question Jiji is unable to answer is if it had mattered all along or if there was a turning point when it had begun to matter. In the case of Laxman, the whole question of acquisition might have started with self-defence. Just as Jiji had murderous intension while defending herself from the intruder of her house, Laxman's phase in life as a goon and murderer might have begun in self-defence. May be it was this realization that kept Mai's faith in him going. Just as Mai intently looked at her palm, envisioning the faces of Gods and Goddesses while reciting the Shloka, 'Karagri Vasate Laxmi' (143), she hoped to one day find a reformed Laxman. Jiji herself is able to see in Laxman many a hidden self. Behind the gangster is a loving uncle but behind the loving uncle is a man capable of cruelty towards his wife. That Mai herself had a glimpse of this sadism in her affectionate brother is revealed in her description of it in her short story 'Black Out'.

It is with the terror attacks directed at her that Jiji reflects over the fate of Laxman who had a strange circular pattern to his life. He perhaps became a terrorist to escape the predicament of being a victim not realizing that what awaited him finally was the fate of being terrorized. He lives in constant fear and finally dies, shot by two men, his body riddled with bullets. There are rumours that his wife Mangal had hired killers. Thus the novel shows that the victimizer has no escape. It is a vicious circle, the circular pattern being the victim – victimizer – victimized.

Baba who had loathed Laxman to the extent of alienating Vasu from him is not totally sure of the appropriateness of his act. His initial conviction about evil is that one

cannot be totally innocent at one point of time, to turn into evil at another unless evil is ingrained in one. But later he does concede that evil is only an aberration, "Our moral nature is inherent in us, implanted for the sake of preservations of the species." (205)

Thus the novel turns out to be a platform for different voices, sometimes speaking in unison and sometimes confronting one another, but never in domination over others. We see that dialogism exists even within an individual's voice when the individual discourse turns out to be a double-voiced discourse, to use Bakhtin's term. If the double voice comes to the forefront now and then in Baba's narration, it is more prominent in the stream of consciousness technique of Jiji.

By laying bare the intimate truths of his relationship with Vasu, Baba enables Jiji to know her parents as people. He hopes that Jiji would do the same with her children. In Jiji's case we see that her whole life is a struggle to either come to terms with 'ampersand' relationships or escape 'ampersand' relationships. The ampersand which means 'the and' becomes a metaphor for the symbiotic relationship between Jiji and Malu. In her attempts to look like Jiji and tie her hair like Jiji, Malu becomes 'the and' of Jiji. But Jiji realizes that her awareness of her own self and the coming into existence of her self was only after Malu was born. In this case Jiji is 'the and' of Malu. Such an existence makes Jiji give up dancing, which she enjoyed, when Malu stopped going to dance classes. It is this relationship that makes Jiji feel uprooted when Malu is taken away to Poona on health grounds to be with Mai's brother Bharath and his wife Medha. It is this symbiosis that makes Jiji's attachment to Shyam unbearable for Malu. This is the root cause of Malu's estrangement from Jiji. This also explains Malu's act of getting into a physical act with Shyam and Jiji's acceptance of their child Sachi as her own. Thus the

ampersand relationship between Jiji and Malu is a highly complex one and Malu's death a shattering experience for Jiji.

With one ampersand relationship broken, Jiji wants to come out of all relationships which would deny her autonomy. Jiji feels that closeness to one invariably means alienation from another. She remembers how her association with Shyam alienated her from Mai. With the birth of Anand, her relationship with Mai was mended but she had drifted away from Shyam. After Shyam's death, she is almost like a recluse. She never warms up to Raja for the fear of losing her self-reliance. Even when there is threat to her life, she refuses to keep her maid Ratna at home as she doesn't want to get used to crutches, a Brechtian symbol of dependence. There are other metaphors which highlight Jiji's urge for self-dependence. Surfing the T.V. with the remote in her hand fills her with an arrant sense of control. While learning driving, she detests the idea of 'dual control' with two brakes. Even in Raman's case the fact that consent and denial were both in her hands gives her body a strange sense of supremacy.

But Jiji's ultimate realization is that human beings always need each other. Baba's diary reveals to her that he is filled with a strange sense of relief and happiness to be with Jiji during his last days. Baba who has a sense of guilt that their neglect of Jiji after the illness of Malu might have driven her desperately to the arms of Shyam, neglecting her studies, career and future, accepts that Vasu and he failed as parents. He had thrust upon Jiji, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, his desires, and had probably initiated her revolt. Jiji also knows that even in the state of coma Mai is comforted by the assurance given by Jiji that she would look after Sachi as her own. After all, the bond between the mother and the daughter is inevitable because of the inseparableness of their bodies before birth

although the umbilical chord is severed soon after birth, giving to the new born a separate identity.

Jiji realizes that by turning away from Baba, Mai and even Gayathri in Jiji's time of bereavement, Jiji had wronged them, especially Baba and Mai as they were not given the chance to make up for their own wrong doing. Jiji also realizes how wrong she was in thinking that she had a life time before her to make up, to go back to being mother and daughter again. Jiji's understanding of Baba's attempts to love and be loved and her recollections of Mai's empty look after she lost Malu, hit her, with such great force that she weeps over the lost chance of not having made up completely with her parents. Jiji views this instance as parents breaking the hearts of their children. Jiji also realizes that her armour of invulnerability had kept Sachi away. Jiji understands that children need to feel as much useful as parents do.

Jiji's greatest moment of epiphany is about her relationship with Raja. In a way, this process too is initiated by the words in Baba's diary. Baba in his diary expresses the hope that Jiji would 'move on' without getting caught in the private world of grief and get comfort in the companionship with Raja. It is only after reading this entry Jiji, who couldn't move beyond the ampersand relationship of 'Shyam and I' considers the possibility of 'Raja and I'. Raja, had all along been her 'dopple gauger' much more meaningful than the 'alter ego'. Raja's violent reaction when Jiji reveals to him her relationship with Raman is a pointer to Jiji that she hadn't been sensitive to Raja's feelings. Although Jiji wants to reassure Raja that what took place between Raman and her was only the dictates of the body, she knows that no matter what explanation she would offer, the ghost of Raman would always be between Raja and her just as her ghost would be between Raman and any other woman he might come into contact with.

However, the bond between Raja and her is so strong that they are able to re-establish their connections. Raja invites her to his site may be to give her the much needed time and quietude to deal with the emotional crisis in her life. Jiji confides in Raja about Sachi not to gain sympathy but to expunge as many shadows as possible between them. In the process of trying to understand Raja and being understood by Raja Jiji sees that Raja himself has remained incomplete.

All these revelations finally prepare Jiji for ampersand relationships in which people can take emotional succour from one another. Be it with her son Anand, be it with her daughter Sachi, be it with Raja, Jiji progresses towards having more open, mutually sustaining relationships. The only relationship she severs is the one with Raman. The point is that any relationship where the body controls the mind is doomed to fail. Jiji attains perfect harmony of the mind and the body when she decides to 'move on'. With allusions to Frost's 'Road not Taken' Jiji avers that the essence of life lies in moving on and not in looking at the road not taken wondering what difference it would have made. Thus the novel suggests the togetherness of Raja and Jiji although none can be sure whether the relationship would bloom as in the case of R.K. and Gayathri or shrivel as in the case of BK and Kamala or Baba and Vasu. But the search has to be taken up irrespective of what awaits at the end of the search.

Thus the diverse ways in which the two central figures look at themselves and a number of other characters who come into contact with them concur with what Graham Allen observes about polyphonic novels:

> In the polyphonic novel we find... a world in which all characters, and even the narrator himself – or herself, are possessed of their own discursive consciousness. The polyphonic novel presents a world in which no individual discourse can stand

objectively above any other discourse; all discourses are interpretations of the world, responses to and calls to other discourses.[21]

The third major discourse in the novel running alongside the discourses on the body and the mind and ampersand human relationships is the discourse on the family. This discourse too is double-voiced. Throughout the novel there are negative, nihilistic references to the inevitable disintegration of families, but in the end there is a volte-face. Jiji attributes the failure of her 'Baba-Mai-Malu-and I' family to the frenzied pace of life and their inability to communicate with one another. She draws on the analogy of the fractured bones getting set in a cast when given time to heal to conclude that her family was not given time to mend and heal. As a child when Jiji was lost and found, it was a harrowing experience for her. But that was in physical terms when the body was lost and found. But, re-establishing the emotional bonding as an adult is even more challenging and agonizing.

Apart from Jiji's family, a number of other families also disintegrate. It is as though disintegration along with old age is inevitable. Friendships wither and relationships go haywire. Baba is surprised that his friendship with BK based on mutually shared interest for ideas and knowledge could grow weak even without any estrangement as such. It is shocking that Kamala could say hurtful things to Gayathri, the very epitome of affection. BK and Kamala get on the nerves of each other with the retarded daughter tormenting them both physically and mentally. Vasu herself is a loner with her mother dead, Laxman unapproachable and Bharath retreating into invalidism. Raja's cousin Venkat's mother Saroja, once pleasant, affectionate, able and efficient is reduced to a pitiable state in her old age. The condition of the old is like the old house being eaten by termite. One is made to wonder if nothing worthwhile remains as bodies decay.

But then the picture is not so bleak after all. People like Gayathri neither disintegrate nor cause disintegration. They have the ability to remain connected. Even those who have drifted away from the original loops of relationships are able to form new loops of relationships. Baba who tries to find an answer to the problem of the impermanence of the body through the solutions of knowledge, speaking and writing which are the outcomes of language and memory and happiness has his search coming to an end with the ultimate realization that each life goes back to the beginning, forming a loop which in turn leads to other loops. Every man's life is an unfulfilled search for the self that would complete him, and the incomplete self is in the fear of death. Theists find fulfillment because God embodies the idea of a self that is complete in itself. But in the case of agnostics like Baba it is the loop of relationships that helps. Baba has a glimpse of the completed self in the loop of relationships he has with his grandchildren Anand and Sachi. It is after glimpsing this loop that Baba understands the true impact of the words, "Eppur Si Muove". (377)

Baba whose friendship with BK has withered has bonds with Raja, B.K's son. B.K. in turn establishes a rapport with Baba's grand daughter Sachi. Thus new loops are formed even if it means jumping over blood relationships. The flowering of the Star of Bethlehem, watched by Jiji, Raja, B.K and Sachi is a shared experience and it is as if Sachi has found a family.

This making or marring of relationships gives to life an alternating pattern of happiness and grief as in Sanskrit dramas. The words 'Sans Sui' in Potsdam which Baba, B.K. and R.K. try to decipher as 'without grief' or 'outside grief' make one point clear to Baba. He knows that grief follows man as his own shadow, but it is imperative that man frees himself from the shackles of grief. Jiji's redemption is possible because she frees

herself of guilt and thereby grief. From a woman who held herself responsible for the destruction of the old house just because she was the one to spot the termites in it, she grows to be a woman who thinks that Shyam did not kill himself, but merely went into the sea, to exhaust himself, but lost control over the situation.

Thus the novel points out that life at no point of time brings people to the end of their search but the essence of life is constituted in the search itself. It is this understanding that will make us believe in ideas like family, marriage and love, despite the fact that such ideas have repeatedly faced defeat. It is the faith in the possibility of the success of an idea that makes people move on. The ultimate message is Eppur Si Muove.

Binod Mishra's pertinent observations on *Moving on* as the work that concerns itself more with the human condition than with just the female condition is a fitting tribute to Deshpande's progress as a humanist. Mishra gives the gist of the thematic concerns as:

- The body is the base of all human ties and relationships.
- The neglect of the body and its vibes may lead to disastrous consequences and affect the entire human personality.
- The connecting and opposing pulls of the body and the soul ensue from one frame and not separately as two entities.

What is clearly discernible in all works of Deshpande is an intense focus on the problems of the self and of inner life through stream of consciousness and internal monologue methods with an emphasis on revelations that James Joyce calls 'epiphanies' and Virginia Woolf 'moments'. The epiphanous moment lies in the paradoxical situation in which even as the self experiences autonomy and personhood, it grows conscious of its existence in the larger frame of humanity. The writer's ultimate message is that no self can exist entire in itself and it can be perceived only through its relationship with other

selves however painful the association might be. That is why one may surmise that three stages of feminism, womanism and humanism are traceable in her works. To begin with, she is concerned with the right to equality and political rights of women. The emphasis gradually shifts to alternative perspectives, privileging differences and the self. Finally there is an attempt to demolish binary oppositions with the realization that the self does not exist in isolation. The fine tapestry of the writer's works weaves an intricate pattern in which feminism merges into humanism.

# NOTES

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[21] Allen, 23.

# CHAPTER 4

## Critiquing the Short Stories of Shashi Deshpande

In an interview with Chandra Holm, Deshpande avers,

> I do believe that women have a great strength. All humans do. Actually we have reserves we are often unaware of. But for women the situation is made more complex by the fact that they have been told they are weak, they are made to believe in their weakness. And often they learn to hide their own strength, because a woman's strength seems to weaken a man. Have I met strong women? Who has not? We all have. Often they are the main supports of the family, though the male is the titular head. I don't say that women are stronger, only that they are better at dealing with emotional traumas. This is because women, unlike men, have never had to suppress their emotional selves, they are more open about these problems - both in articulating them and understanding them.
>
> My protagonists being women, one of the things they question is the fact of their being females, what it has done to them. But they are also probing the human condition, the human predicament. In this thinking process, humans do discover their own potential. So do the women I have written about.[1]

In the words of Deshpande, one can clearly see the stand of an anthropological feminist who questions the androcentric bias in a given culture by arguing that women and men experience gender differently from one another with reference to different sets of social markers. The theoretical school of feminist anthropology emerged in the 1970s. Until the mid-1980s, the feminist anthropologists tended to assume women to be a homogenous

group where they shared a subordinate position under men. In the late 1980s, however, feminist anthropologists began to attack this notion. They argued that the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s was led by white-middle class scholars and that the movement failed to consider a variety of divisions within women. These feminist anthropologists showed that wealthy women's social positions and attitudes support social systems that oppress poor women, especially non-white women. Thus, one arm of feminist anthropology focuses on how mainstream feminism has been elitist, with its flaw of universalistic assumptions. However, when I use the term 'anthropological feminism', it is not to point out its deviation from the mainstream feminism. Neither is it to pit the anthropological feminism against the mainstream criticism, but to uphold its view that if one were to consider biological imperative and social behaviour, one can see that human expressions of gender and sexuality are not biological constants but politically constructed norms. Feminist anthropology controverts the notion of the whole world being viewed through the male idiom, wherein female experience and identity are subsumed.

One of the objectives of the study is to show how creative writing is another form of critical debates. Creative writing, when taken up with the earnestness of giving voice to the marginalized, attains the seriousness of ethnographical writing. If we understand the truth that until recent times be it in history, be it in sociology, be it in literature, be it in cultural studies, we only had reflections of what the male ethnographers had to say, we will know the faulty nature of representation as far as women are concerned. Male ethnographers generally had access to only other males, and therefore, could only observe them or could only get their accounts of what women were like or what they were supposed to be like. That is why the aim of the feminist anthropology is to encourage women to think in new ways about their own experiences and lives. Succinctly put,

feminist anthropology is nothing but an earnest declaration that women have the right to make choices for themselves.

However, separating biological and cultural factors that control human behaviour and personality development on the basis of sex/gender system is not an easy task because sex and gender do not exist as two watershed compartments. Precisely for the same reason, when there is an attempt to show how the culture is different from nature, there is stiff resistance. Hence, one of the generative influences, slow but sure to impact, is the field of creative writing. It will expose erroneous beliefs in a manner acceptable to even phallocentricists and impact the collective unconsciousness in the desirable manner and lead to reformulations.

Deshpande has been studied with this hope and Deshpande's short stories have been divided on the basis of the female experience that she foregrounds, popularly held notions that she debunks, the value of human relationships that she upholds, political and social situations that she satirises and the myths that she re-writes.

**Female Experience**

Deshpande in the 'Introduction' to the volume dealing with the controversial story 'Death of a Child' refers to the criticism of the feminists who find in the story regressive trend as the speaker in the story is guilty about her action of aborting the child. The criticism in fact, belittles the sensitivity with which Deshpande has dealt with the subject of abortion. The bond between the mother and the child, whether born or unborn, goes beyond the question of right and wrong as well as the question of rights and choices. Deshpande is not judgmental about women who may have to undergo abortion for various reasons. She is merely sensitive to the feelings of women when they have to abort their own flesh and blood. In fact, the story urges readers to understand the predicament

of women and not be judgmental about them. The 'Death of a Child' is gripping in its narration of the feelings of a woman who wants to abort her child. The woman who is expecting for the third time in four years has a feeling of being trapped by motherhood as she knows that having a child means giving the whole of oneself to the child. For the husband the decision comes out as a callous one with no love for the child to be born. However, after the abortion, it is the husband who can get back to the normal routine without any difficulty even as the woman is torn by guilt, grief and shame. Her heart goes out to the unborn child that had come into being despite the efforts of the parents not to allow that to happen. The tenacity of the foetus was broken by the mother's decision to abort it and despite the law being on her side, the mother's guilt is so overpowering that she feels the presence of the ghost of the child as she walks away from the hospital. On the contrary, her husband is at ease and the whole thing is over for him.

'The First Lady' while focusing on the dull existence of the old, briefly touches upon the Gandhian Ideology and the readiness with which men followed him even in his principle of celibacy. But the women's predicament was not important for such men. That the women were not happy is shown through the reference to the attraction of the wife of a Gandhian for a young man. Although she had not yielded to the temptation, the fact remains that her husband's celibacy did not automatically put an end to her desires. In this story, the prowess of Deshpande as a story teller lies in the fact that she succeeds at throwing light on the injustice meted out to women by men who followed Gandhian Ideology, without caricaturing Gandhian ideals themselves.

'An Antidote to Boredom' reveals the grey aspect of married life when the husband and the wife take the existence of each other for granted and have no element of romance left in them. The wife is attracted towards another man but like most Indian

women doesn't go the whole way and abstains from getting into an extra-marital relationship. Deshpande's bold stand on the question of sexual liberation comes to the forefront when her heroine muses over the loss, as letting go of the best part of her life.

'The Duck' has the strange plot of a writer trying to seduce a married woman not because he finds her attractive but because he has lost his faith in the innocence of women ever since he saw his mother in bed. The woman, who hadn't shown any interest in the man earlier, comes to him one day by herself. It is later that the writer realizes that it was two days after losing her husband and children in an accident that she had come to him. Was it her desperate attempt to be written about by the writer so that she would be able to leave behind the memories of her life of which her family was part that drove her to the incomprehensible act? The answer is left to the imagination of readers.

'My Beloved Charioteer' has as its nucleus the problem of interpersonal communication among people, caught in strained relationships. The story is one more instance of Deshpande's leit motif of the daughter being closer to her father than to her mother. The premature widowhood of the daughter compounds the problem. The mother, who has the worldly wisdom of knowing that life has to be accepted as it comes and that no one has promised us happiness for a lifetime, is appalled by the negative emotions of the daughter who seems to hate people who are happy. In addition, the daughter is angry with the mother for not having informed her of her father's illness well in advance. The mother who had done so on explicit directions from her husband has to bear the brunt of the brusque behaviour of her daughter. The mother's respite lies in the grand daughter Priti, who is close to her Ajji. The mother, who could silently bear her daughter's derisive behaviour towards her, is not able to accept her daughter's negativity towards her own daughter. It is here that the story has a turning point because the mother shows courage in

breaking her silence to reveal to her daughter the true nature of her father in his role as husband. She is brutally frank in revealing to her daughter that from the act of sex to the task of cooking, it was her father's wish that she had to fulfill. The revelations, she knows, will make it possible for her daughter to let go of her father's memories and probably limp back to a normal life with her own daughter. The revelation would probably show to the daughter that the grief of prematurely losing her husband is not far worse than being in a state of denial throughout one's life. The daughter, who had earlier found her physical growing confounding, finds this growth towards new knowledge painful. But the journey enables her to understand her mother.

'The Valley in the Shadow' is one more story on the theme of self-acceptance. In this story Deshpande's canvas expands to include a cripple as the protagonist. Deshpande deals with the question of female sexuality in the case of a crippled woman who has experienced the rejection of her husband. She is on a holiday and gets acquainted with a man who is in the next room. They do not see each other although they speak to each other when both are out on the balcony. The man, to her astonishment and also relief, reacts to her lameness in a matter-of-fact way. The woman staunchly refuses his request to come over to her room mainly because of her unwillingness to be seen in the crippled form. Yet, she fantasizes about him. On learning about his wife she is ashamed of her thoughts. Strangely, the experience allows her to view others and her own self in a new light and she is in a position to accept others and her own self without negativity.

'The Intrusion' has the unmistakable feminist concern of marital rape. The story revolves around a newly married couple on their honeymoon. Reaching the destination is an exciting proposition for the man as it promises him physical intimacy with his wife. But the experience is not the same for the woman. While the man thinks of their physical

union as the most natural act of the married couple, the woman finds the idea repulsive as the two have not known each other and have not yet established an emotional bond. Her feeble attempts at making the man understand her predicament by saying, "We ...we scarcely know each other,"are brushed aside by the man who questions, "What has that to do with it? Aren't we married now? And how will we start getting to know each other if you put on such a touch-me-not air?"[2] For the man, getting to know the woman is through her body; but for her, it is through the mind. She tries to explain, but he doesn't understand her and the worst happens with his intruding upon her body and her privacy in the night when she least expects it. The story shows how a relationship that could have blossomed into a beautiful one with mutual understanding is crushed at the very outset and how such a relationship in which sex is a routine physical act is doomed to fail at the emotional level.

'The Eternal Theme' is on the theme of passion between a man and a woman. It voices the passion of a young girl for an old poet whom she has met in a seminar. Her attraction for him is almost palpable. Her passion is perhaps intensified by the setting, in which there are erotic stone carvings. However, the song in her heart dies when she hears another girl speaking about the man, insinuating him of making sexual advances. The girl buries the flower given by the man in the sand and leaves the spot with her hand and heart empty.

'The Window' with unmistakable references to lesbianism states that it is despite oneself that one would have the lesbian tendency. The speaker is ashamed of herself when she remembers the lesbian relationship she had with a hostel mate years ago. She dreads that the woman, the landlady, might force herself upon her. But her greater fear is that she herself might one day go to the landlady. By making the narrative first person,

Deshpande makes it clear that the story is neither an attempt to understand lesbianism nor a move to be judgmental about it, but only to acknowledge the fact that lesbianism is an urge to reckon with.

'I Want' graphically deals with the 'wants' of the male being honoured and the 'wants' of the female being stifled in matrimony. It is the typical case of a girl surrendering illusions and embracing reality. The end, which shows the 27 year old Alka saying 'yes' to an alliance simply because she has no choice, may come under the attack of the feminists as being regressive in tone. But it is not difficult to see why Deshpande projects the end as a compromise, for the sake of her parents, on the part of the girl. Deshpande's intention is to point out that in marriage the odds are still in favour of the male and the voice of the female surfaces only to acquiesce.

'Ghosts' explains the sense of alienation suffered by a married woman who is in England with her little baby. She finds herself in a grey world cut off from her family, with no one to speak to. Her husband, who gives her company only for a few hours in a day, often rejects her sexual advances in the night without realizing how desperate she is for human touch. The frustrated woman slowly turns into a T.V. addict even as back home people think of her life as enviable. The story presents the not so beautiful world of expatriates. It also foregrounds the question of female loneliness and insecurity which is the outcome of male ambition of making money and growing prosperous.

**Truths Exposed**

Scholarly works have now established that patriarchy as a system has ruled the whole of the world for more than 5000 years. Yet, its existence has been either not recognized or denied. That is why women writers go back to the theme of male-hegemony repeatedly to expose it in all its hues and shades.

'The Story' propounds how and why women have turned out to be subservient to men. The story points at two unnatural moves resulting in the unhealthy situation. The first is when men start on a journey to know the secret behind immortality. Although women do not embark on a similar journey, they do nothing to dissuade men from starting on the journey. The search symbolizes greed for material possessions and once men become victims of it, there is no end to their self-abnegation. Secondly, when the men bring home a woman, an unnatural one, as she is the result of man's fantasy, there is further degradation of the women-folk. The story shows that the root-cause of damnation is not only materialism but also man's weakness to perpetuate himself without realizing that it is in the children he begets that he eternalizes himself. The narrator herself is not free of this vulnerability because she admits that she too would like to see how the story continues. Each narrator is not merely a narrator but also a contributor as she gets involved with the story. In fact, even the ones whose voice is not heard add a new dimension to the story as their silence speaks of their predicament of being silenced. Thus, we can see that 'The Story' operates at a metaphoric level, taking the question of subjugation of women, in an original frame-work.

'A Liberated Woman' is the short-story version of the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. It is a little surprising that the majority of critical respone to the novel does not make a point of this.

'The Shadow' is the melancholic story of a child who is arrantly rejected by the father who is aware that the child is not his. The couple continues to live together for the sake of their children, but unfortunately, while the other two children born within the wedlock receive the love of both their parents, the little girl, the result of an extra-marital affair is cruelly spurned by the father. The shadow of illegitimacy follows her closely and

the mother, who pleads with the father not to be cruel towards the innocent child, is unable to protect the child from the merciless barbs of the father. Once again the question that crops up is whether the situation would be the same if a woman has to play mother to the illegitimate offspring of her husband. Such stories point out that society still a man's world.

'A Day like Any Other' has a new take on infidelity in marriage. The wife, on coming to know of her husband's infidelity, does not exhibit the usual bitterness. Even when she questions her husband, she does so in a dispassionate manner. She is not greatly perturbed by his admission of guilt. She does not find it necessary to present herself attractively to her husband. She scorns the idea that the relationship between a husband and a wife can be sustained by mere physical aspects. That is why his love-making, more an act of guilt than affection, neither shocks nor pleases her. Yet the revelations do not leave her untouched. There is a new awareness that she has about herself. If she's not grief-stricken, if her cheeks are dry in the night without tears, it is because of her exhilarating feeling that her happiness is her own and she will not allow it to be maligned by the infidelity of her husband.

'A Man and a Woman' is another shocker not so much for the illicit relationship of a thirty year old widowed sister-in-law with her Seventeen year old brother-in-law as for a cripple's firmness in thinking that he could do so much more in life and that he could get married to the widow. The story treats sex as nothing more than a biological need which gets blown out of proportion when given too much importance.

'The Legacy' has the unusual plot of a dying man bequeathing his possessions onto a boy who he thinks is his blood. He reveals to the speaker through a letter that he was requested by a couple, years ago in his young age to help them beget a child. But the

speaker is in for a surprise when she meets the woman because she is told that the boy being helped is not her first son and that the first son had died in his infancy The surprise element of the story lies in the matter-of-fact way in which the woman accepts the man or men in her life with the sole purpose of getting an heir. The story has different layers of meaning. First of all it shows how the question of morality is subverted as the idea of begetting a child, gains dominance. The husband in question perhaps welcomes other men into the life of his wife to save himself the disgrace of not being able to beget a child. The wife accepts the situation as if it were a simple business deal probably because of her idea that she should follow what her husband says. Thus, the story is a satire on the very concept of morality, the obsession for the continuation of the family name and the cowardice of the husband in concealing his impotency even at the cost of illegitimacy. The story clearly depicts how the questions of chastity and purity are relative terms, and are bent according to male prerogative.

'It was the Nightingale' speaks of a married woman who goes abroad for better prospects, but is not able to get rid of the feeling of guilt. The husband, for whom his self-sacrificing aunt is the ideal woman, doesn't make things easier for her either. Naturally the question that crops up is whether the situation would have been the same if the man of the house had to go abroad for better prospects. The suggestion is that the situation would have been a celebratory one had it been the man. The story once again points to the patriarchal structure of society showing how the balance has never been tilted in women's favour.

**Human Relationships**

Whether Deshpande's canvas is the larger canvas of a novel or a much smaller canvas of a short story, in work after work, her recurring theme remains human

relationships. The novelist's genuine concern seems to be the question if this world can be a better place to live in with simple strokes of love, understanding, openness, forgiveness and acceptance. Even as her artistic brush sweeps across casual relationships to binding attachments, one of the motifs turns out to be the strain in mother-daughter relationship. These stories have been prioritized over other stories which revolve around relationships among chance acquaintances and abiding associations.

The story 'Lucid Moments' pictures with lucidity the last moment of a woman suffering from metasis as described by her daughter, Sujata. The daughter who wasn't very close to her mother unlike her younger sister, Shilpa, finds herself breaking the barrier and edging towards her mother with greater warmth. She is a witness to her mother's agony on not being able to remember her own mother's name. Strangely the troubled mother's desperate attempts to remember her mother whom she had lost soon after she was born make Sujata understand the reality of every mother's presence although mothers usually efface their identity with the mantle of motherhood falling on them. This insight inspires Sujata to make her niece Karuna aware of her grandmother's name. Sujata's final words on mothers are, "...even if they never chant a litany of their names at a wedding, these women are real?"[3]

'Why a Robin?' is a story on human relationships and shows how a mother is able to build a bridge across the void of silence with her little daughter by overcoming her inhibition to show her love and speak to her little one.

In 'Lost Spring' Deshpande once again exhibits her prowess of stunning the readers with the unexpected. The story deals with the painful revelations of the speaker who as an adult realizes that she was responsible for her mother's death. The story places before the readers the family of five - the parents, two sons and a daughter, the last being

the speaker of the story. The family is suddenly made to face the problem of the mother suffering from tuberculosis. The children get distanced from the mother until the day of the arrival of a girl, who with her vivacious nature bridges the gap between the children and the mother bringing them closer. However, the girl one day is engaged in playful frolicking in the river water with the father and the speaker, who feels left out as she doesn't know how to swim, narrates the incident to the mother. That night the mother commits suicide and years later while on a holiday with her husband the speaker realizes that it was the revelations of the water-sport to the mother that had driven her mother to the act of committing suicide. The speaker as an adult experiencing the romantic mood of her husband is able to glimpse the sexual urge that surfaces when men let go of themselves in the vast expanse of water. She also realizes that it was the awareness of this that had made her mother, suffering from chronic illness put an end to her life. The story ends with the poignant sense of guilt suffered by the speaker. The story is powerful in its narration and the face of a woman floating in the water, hallucinated by the speaker haunts the readers through out the story. The story is a typical example of how Deshpande oscillates effortlessly from one thematic concern to another.

'Memorabilia' serves the twin purpose of looking into the private lives of women and the old. Deshpande juxtaposes these two vulnerable sections of family to show that 'they have no choice'. The speaker, one of the four daughters of a widow, has come home to convince her mother to sell her house and live with her daughters. The daughters plan the sale of the house despite the knowledge that the mother won't be happy with the proposition. It is when the speaker is trying to clear the house of unwanted stuff that the mother shows her attachment for her mother's kumkum box. The speaker's mother had lost her mother as a child and the kumkum box brings to her the painful memories of her mother bleeding to death after giving birth to a still-born. It is much later that the

motherless daughter realizes that her mother's insistence on going to her parents' home where there was no medical facility was responsible for her death. The motherless daughter also realizes that her mother used to flee to her native place just to avoid the conception of the next child at least for six months. Listening to her mother, the speaker realizes that her mother had lived constantly in fear of leaving her own children motherless. The daughter now has a new insight into the life of her mother. She realizes that she along with her sisters had left the mother with no choice at all. With this realization the speaker is determined to offer her mother the right of choice and decides against the idea of selling the house. Thus the story deals very sensitively with the question of choice which the old deserve to have, but are often not given.

'And Then...?' has an answer hinted at only in the concluding part of the story. The speaker, recently widowed, feels helpless and bitter with her unmarried daughter Anju who has left her to go to the states and her married son Vishwa who seems to be burdened with the responsibility of having to look after her. The woman has a sense of not belonging and wonders about her future. Although the story offers no definitive solution in the end, there is a suggestion that the speaker will start making decisions on her own. In her ripe old age she realizes that the parents' hands are always there for the children to clutch on to, but the reverse is true only with conditions attached. With this realization, there is an answer to the question, "And then...?" This story, like a few others, deals with the problems of old age and loneliness and drives home the idea that there is the necessity to embark upon a journey of self-reliance and independence even in the twi-light stage of life.

'Madhu' talks about parent-child relationship from a different angle. Here, the question is of father-daughter bond. The story highlights that many tender feelings may

go unrecognized among family members, but these feelings make family a master piece, despite all its associated problems. The speaker, Madhu's father's friend, knows that Madhu cut her hair short as an act of sacrifice when her father Gopi had a massive heart attack. But Lalitha, the mother, is sad that the girl snipped her lovely hair short and she takes it as one more act of resistance on the part of the self-willed daughter. It is possible that the daughter too misunderstands her parents on different occasions. But whether communicated or not, it is the bonding among the family members that makes life worth living. Thus the story advocates the virtues of a family.

Likewise 'The Awakening' too has the touching plot of a daughter understanding the struggle of her father and accepting the failure of people who are cursed by poverty as the victims of the predicament that is beyond their control. Alka, the ambitious daughter, had always been intolerant of her father who, according to her, did not try hard enough to get out of the rut he had placed himself and his family in. She was taken away from the depressing conditions, for sometime, by her maternal grandfather, resulting in her aspirations being higher than what her condition allowed. But later, when she came across a letter in which her father, quoting from David Copperfield, had expressed his hope that his children and especially Alka would do well in life, the daughter realizes how unfair she had all along been towards her father. So the words, "In our children, my dear Copperfield, we live again!"[4] serve as the turning point of the story.

As a contrast, we have the story 'The Boy' which has the plot of the son being disciplined cruelly by his father, Subbayya, a cook, whom even the inmates of the house fear. One day, the boy runs away and although the speaker, a boy himself, finds him, he doesn't report the matter at home because he wants the boy to escape from the brutal

clutches of his father. Tending buffaloes seems to be the right choice and a better option for the boy than coming back to his cruel father.

Human relationships being her forte, Deshpande is able to incorporate myriad possibilities in diverse relationships both inside and outside the structure of a family. What is remarkable is that there is never a note of dissonance between what she wants to say and how she says it.

'Anatomy of a Murder' dissects what can be termed a freak murder. In the criminal set-up, the murder would go as a strange one without a motive. It is the murder of a middle-aged woman by a young boy who, in fact, is fascinated by her kind smile, accompanied by the word 'sorry'. The boy who is denied such gentle treatment at home and elsewhere hopes to receive the same smile from the woman when he goes to her place to supply provision. When he doesn't get it, he is hit by the thought that he doesn't exist for her and the idea that the only way to enter her world is by hurting her makes him murder her. Thus an apparently motiveless murder is committed by the boy. Deshpande unfolds the bizarre layer of the human psyche in this short story. The reader is left with a sense of loss – a loss for which no one can be held responsible.

'Can You Hear Silence' presents a typical urbanized set-up where children born to middle-class parents are denied the leisurely pace and silence of the rural set-up.

'Waste Lands' refers to an incommunicable region that exists between a couple. Neither of them is able to tread and cross the waste land despite the love they have for each other. The genesis of the wasteland goes back to a trip of fifteen days that the speaker goes on with her journalism course participants. She is relieved to have the company of Tushar, but her joy is marred by the presence of a married woman who is obviously interested in being with Tushar. Although the speaker and Tushar poke fun at

the woman as the 'third', who always walked with them, her presence between them does cause a misunderstanding and leads to unpleasant situations wherein the speaker is indifferent towards Tushar. Tushar, in his attempts to make up with the speaker, ignores the woman and rejects the food offered by her while in the train. It is the last day of the trip and it is the return journey and before the journey ends, it is revealed that the woman has committed suicide. The speaker is unable to rid herself of guilt and the words 'Damyata, Datta, Dhayadhvam' – self-control, charity and compassion from 'The Waste Land' mock her. Even after she marries Tushar, the waste land continues to haunt her.

'Retrospective' is about a man whose poetic sensibility makes him live in a world of unreality in which there is no place for genuine human relationships. In every situation he finds a scope for fantasy and the speaker who had earlier thought that the man loved her, later realizes that in his case even his mother's death only leads to self-indulgent grief. The speaker, who had earlier wished for the death of her mother in order to go to him, is able to not only free herself of her obsession for the man but also declare that the story he would weave of the evening he spent with her would make no difference to her.

'The Pawn' is the story of the infatuation of Ramaswami for a girl whom he initially considers 'not even pretty' although later finds beautiful. His analogy for the situation is of a table lamp, "...with a cover made of silk. It looked dull until you switched on the light. Then you saw the rich colours, the beautiful patterns of the silk."[5] The girl had the similar metamorphosis when she lifted her eyelids and smiled at Ramaswami. Ramaswami, who takes the girl along with her parents, the Kulkarnis around Bangalore for a day, takes their address, intending to write to them. But the effect of the meet slowly wears off and in a week's time, Ramaswamy finds his attraction for the girl absurd and tears off the address slip. Ramaswamy, who had earlier thought of the

girl standing on the checkered floor as a pawn and her parents king and queen, later, thinks of himself as the pawn. The story perhaps suggests that we are all pawns in the game of life. We are ineffectual because when it comes to the crucial question of decision making, we fail to act.

'The Dim Corridor' shows how it is impossible to honour impulses and be truthful to yourself when placed within the framework of societal norms and mores. Smitha, a young teacher of 25 and Vinod, her student of 16 have a bond between them which gets established in the first place because of Vinod's interest in literature, but grows stronger because of the inevitable attraction that exists between a female and a male. However, when questioned by the boy's mother, in the presence of the head of the school, Smitha gives it the colouring of the pure relationship between a teacher and a pupil. She has to stick to her explanation when Vinod questions her about the truthfulness of it despite herself because the reality does not allow any other relationship to exist between a teacher and a student. With her denial of the reality, the fire in Vinod dies and the bond snaps. The story depicts the compromise human beings have to make with their relationships, emotions and passions if life has to continue with the semblance of normalcy and decency.

'The Cruelty Game' exposes the streak of sadism that is inherent in almost all individuals making them hurt others. Sharu, who has lost her father, is brought to her grand-father's place along with her mother and is at the receiving end of the pranks of other children. Yet, she retains her trusting nature and her mother, Pramila aunty, retains her stoicism. But the day it is revealed to Sharu that her mother would be marrying her father's friend, Jagdish, the scene is traumatic and the story ends with references to

Sharu's rejection of her mother. Nevertheless, there is a ray of hope in the words of the speaker's father when he says, "Maya, they'll be all right, they'll manage."[6]

'Rain' exemplifies the unexpected twist that Deshpande is able to introduce by suddenly changing the rhythm of the story. A story, which could have stopped at the happy prospect of a widow re-marriage, has the unexpected taking place with the guilt of the speaker that makes it impossible for him to be a man with his wife Radha. The reason is that it was on the night of the death of Radha's husband that they were physically drawn to each other just before a phone call from the hospital had shocked them. A similar rainy evening imprisons the speaker in a circle of guilt when the phone rings and he has no respite from his guilt and uneasiness after that.

Perhaps one of the rare times, when Deshpande's artistic ability failed her, is seen in 'The Miracle'. Despite its philosophical ruminations on how one can see miracles in all things if one has the inclination to do so, the story lacks the depth, intensity and profundity of Deshpande's other short stories. Nevertheless, it makes a pleasant reading as it narrates the story of love and marriage between a scientist and a clerk working for him in his lab. Interwoven with this thematic concern is the question of faith. Narayan, a worker in the lab, believes that a monkey by the name Raja is the reincarnation of Lord Hanuman and the story pictures the usually abstracted scientist looking at the monkey with a new insight even as he learns to respect the feelings of others.

**Political and Social Plots**

'Independence Day' employs the technique of memory. The speaker has memories coming to her not sequentially, but in disorder. It is at the time of her father's death that the speaker remembers her childhood days. Her memories of the celebration of an Independence-day programme in which she was chosen to be Bharath Mata are

interspersed with the memories of Sindhi refugees who were given shelter at Padma's place. Among them was a mother who had lost her daughter to the cruelty of rioters at the time of India's Independence. The speaker also refers to another pair of brother and sister, victims of hate, whose eyes seemed unnatural like those of a statue. On the one hand, if the story focuses on these homeless refugees, on the other, the story makes a poignant reference to a map of India which is kept ready for the Independence day celebrations. The map looked elongated and distorted as it was devoid of Sind Province. The speaker who should have felt privileged in the role of Bharath Mata, is, instead, engulfed by the grief of the mother who has lost her daughter. Thus the story satirizes the glory attached to the Independence Day celebration and highlights the cruelty and ugliness India as a country had to face for the glory of Independence. The author points out that by glorifying historical events like the Dandi March as non-violent, we have forgotten the grief and pain of those people who were victims of violence at the time of partition.

'The Day Bapu Died' is also a satire highlighting the divide between being a Gandhian in principle and in reality. The speaker's father had a Harijan for a servant as if to prove his allegiance to Gandhism, but was uncomfortable with the idea of the servant's son, Ashok, hovering around the house. The story also touches upon the repercussions felt by others when the master of the house is a Gandhian. The wife has to curb all her desires and is made to feel guilty about cooking delicacies. The daughter cannot take part in the dances and dramas of the school. Yet the Gandhian father cannot accept his son's relationship with a Christian, quite contrary to Gandhi's dream of a casteless society. The shock of the confrontation between the father and the son leads to the sudden death of the mother. Coincidentally, it happens to be the same day as Gandhi's death. The fate

of the Christian girl with whom the son was in love is no less tragic. After the unrequited love affair, the girl who is rumoured to be an old judge's mistress commits suicide.

The story 'It was Dark' deals with the raw pain of the parents of a rape-victim. The girl herself, barely fourteen, remains incommunicable except to say that it was dark. The father, in addition, has the fear of possible pregnancy as the girl had spent three days with the man who had abducted her. However, when the mother, desperate to communicate, draws open the curtains and lets the light in, the girl for the first time after the horror, takes in the presence of her mother. Unlike in *Binding Vine,* Deshpande doesn't deal with the questions of stigma and justice in this short story. The story, however, is a heart-wrenching narration invoking deep pathos.

'The Homecoming' bleakly presents the picture of the economically backward and helpless women. Ai is able to do nothing for her daughter Anju, who rebels in order to marry a man of her choice, only to be physically abused. The younger daughter Suman's attempt to get help from her neighbour Tai, a social worker, supposedly helping women in distress, goes futile as all that Tai does, is to close the door of her house after witnessing the horror of Anju's husband brutally dragging Anju out of the house. The attempts of Anju's brother Suresh, Ai and Suman to stop the brutal husband are in vain as the over-powering brute assaults them too. The relieving feature of the story lies in Suman's resolution to bring her sister back. The light from Tai's house holds no promise for her, but her determination is unflinching. The title 'Home Coming' refers to the pitiable circumstances that make Anju come back deflated to the house, which she had left with a man of her choice, with dreams for a happy future.

**Myths Re-written**

Jasbir Jain, in her full-fledged critique of Deshpande, has dedicated a chapter by the title 'The Crux of the Matter' to discuss Deshpande's short stories, especially those which have a special emphasis on rereading myths. Jain observes, "Any attempt to open out these myths and reinterpret, specially from the gender perspective, implies several things; the need to come out of male-governed structures, the awareness of the 'self' as an individuated being, a psychological probing into the subconscious are some of the necessary steps."[7]

'The Stone Women' is a powerful story which puts forth the idea that woman is a projection of male desire just as the sculpted stone women are the sculpted images of what men would have wanted women to be. The speaker and her husband, married for five months, are looking at the architectural marvel of the sculpted stone women when the speaker gets troubled by the question if real women could ever have been like these stone women – joyous, playful, narcissistic, with lush bodies and high breasts. The speaker realizes that such women are merely the extension of male voyeuristic imagination. It is only after this truth hits the speaker that she is able to assert her right to wear what she wants although the husband cannot understand this psychological shift. Her assertion at the end of the story that the dress that she wears is what she chooses to wear as it is comfortable although her husband doesn't like it, signifies the woman's attempt to come out of male dictates of what a woman should be. It is a direct contrast to the earlier act of throwing away a silver bracelet, worn happily for a long time until then, just because the husband finds it ugly. The story also touches upon the idea that sensuality is justified as divinity with the queen's dance being considered obeisance to Gods.

'Mirrors', the first person narration of Sachidevi, Indra's wife, once again takes up the question of women's silence and women's predicament of being silenced. It rereads the story of Sachidevi, the target of Nahusha's lust. Along with Nahusha, Indra too is exposed and his various infirmities are brought to light. The remarkable feature of the story is the bond established by Sachidevi with Nahusha's wife, supposedly an arch rival, as she takes the place of Sachidevi in heaven. She takes the position of queen in heaven, but is aware that Sachidevi has taken possession of her husband's emotions. The mute point of the story is the understanding between the two women of the predicament of each other and their conjoined effort to bring some order into their chaotic lives. Their efforts can be viewed from the feminist perspective of sisterhood. They know that no longer they can remain as silent spectators, but need to act for common good even at the prospect of possible personal loss. Nahusha's wife, who is well aware of Nahusha's virtues until the fall, is prepared to sacrifice him and Sachidevi is prepared for the eventuality of Nahusha reaching her despite her trap of asking him to be borne by seven rishis on his way to her place. The strength of these two women is that they know that the welfare of the world around them is more important than private trials. Thus, the two women, who had all along acted only as mirrors reflecting only that which their husbands wanted to see, now act according to the call of their inner voice. The story ends with Sachidevi viewing herself without the shell of a queen and Indra being shown as a debauchee or vanquisher of honest voices like that of Vritra who dares to raise his voice against tyranny. In this manner, instead of a story that mirrors the much circulated myth, a new story that questions the myth is written.

'The Inner Rooms' voices Amba's anger at the unjust act of Bhishma. Bhishma's elevated act of sacrifice gets viewed derogatorily: "By renouncing his right to the throne, to have children of his own, so that his father could marry the fisherman's daughter,

Bhishma had let go of the shadow and grasped at the substance. He gained power over all of them, his father, his stepmother and their two sons. Power-drunk, he had become arrogant, uncaring of how he sacrificed others to his own ideas."[8] Amba, however, knows that Bhishma too is trapped by the empty, meaningless words and ideas, other people's ideas, as she herself is. She knows that both men and women are conditioned to act in specific ways and that they have no control over their actions. That is why, in the final stage of life, Amba is devoid of the fire of revenge. Her only desire is not to be a pawn confined to the Inner Rooms, but to be a deliberate decision maker. The act of mounting the funeral pyre and setting herself ablaze gives her the satisfaction of indulging in a self-willed act. She is momentarily troubled by the question as to where the act would take her and feels trapped. However, she remains inexorable in her decision of severing ties with the world where life was lived according to rules that made no sense to her.

The re-written story can raise the eye-brows of feminists who might view Amba's stand as defeatist. Naturally, the question that arises is if rejection of the world by putting an end to oneself is in anyway reflective of woman's power or strength of decision making. Obviously, the answer is in the negative. Then what could be the motive behind the author choosing to rewrite the story of Amba? Perhaps Deshpande tries to show why women act as they do and through Amba's action of putting an end to her life, Deshpande rejects a world which has not taken a single dictation of women. When the world is shown as unfair, it is not a reinforcement of unfairness, but a hope for a change. Thus, 'The Inner Rooms' is a gripping story bringing aloft the grief and resignation of Amba who is usually seen as a metaphor for revenge. Deshpande projects Amba, a wronged woman, who after her fiery fight for justice is in the end a melancholic woman, as a metaphor for colossal waste – waste of beauty, waste of talent, waste of happiness – a sad outcome of men's thoughtless acts and resolutions.

In 'Hear me, Sanjaya' we find one more attempt at rereading myths. Kunti is the protagonist who addresses Sanjaya who is credited with the wisdom of knowing the inner truth of worldly happenings. Kunti has the feeling that he alone will understand what she has to narrate. Set in the backdrop of war, the story zigzags into the lives of King Dasharatha, his wife Gandhari, Pandu, Madri, Draupadi and Kunti herself. Shadowlining the narration are references to Karna and Kunti's irrevocable guilt over abandoning him. Although she tries to explain her action as the impulsive, immature and impetuous action of a young girl, she cannot rid herself of compunction. She knows that she is answerable to one more wrong-doing - the act of making all the five Pandavas share Draupadi in spite of knowing that Draupadi was in love only with Arjuna. Was it Kunti's way of teaching the young and fiery Draupadi a humbling lesson? Kunti's lack of beauty is acutely felt by her especially when she is pitted against beautiful Madri and her sense of fulfillment lies in her powerful role as charioteer of her sons, guiding them and leading them. By making Draupadi have conjugal relationship with all the five, Kunti hopes to keep the brothers together forever. Gandhari's act of blinding herself is viewed not so much as an act of sacrifice as of revenge. That is why Dasharatha is at peace and free of guilt when Gandhari removes the blindfold. The root cause of all suffering is attributed to the irresponsible vows taken by self-willed men and women. Bhishma's vow surfaces with the story of Amba, Ambika and Ambalika and Kunti makes iconoclastic references to the deified figure of Bhishma. Krishna too is referred to as a schemer who makes Draupadi accept Subhadra as Arjuna's wife. Interwoven with all this is also the reference to the futility of war. War is shown as the tragic mistake of men who are decision-makers and the wasteful carnage of war gets reflected in the silent tears shed by Gandhari and Draupadi who have lost their flesh and blood in the war. Kunti, who is in the twilight of her life, has the ultimate realisation that peace is attained only when there is an end to

power-mongering and all worldly possessions are given up. In rereading and rewriting the myth of Kunti, Deshpande's concern is both feminist and humanist. While referring to Bhishma's vow which ruins the lives of three women; Krishna's plot which makes Draupadi accept the second woman in her husband's life; Draupadi's state as far from idyllic; Gandhari's blindfolding as more an act of spite than sacrifice; Kunti's sense of insecurity in the presence of beautiful Madri; and Kunti's inerasable guilt over an act she was pushed into; if Deshpande has feministic rereading of the situation, in her references to war she has undoubted humanist ideas. Thus the short story is loaded with both radical and moving thoughts.

'The Last Enemy' in Dhuryodhana's life, in the story by the same title is Death, the fear of whom he conqueres while standing alone in the cold water, defeated and defamed. He can then pity even Bhima, who, he knows, would make the mistake of gloating over his victory over Dhuryodhana without realizing that Dhuryodhana has gone beyond the stage of triumph and defeat. Deshpande takes a refreshingly different look at the archetypal villain, Dhuryodhana. Deshpande traces his villainy back to his childhood days when he was made to feel eternally inferior to Arjuna and Bhima.

'And What Has Been Decided?' rereads Draupadi's story. The controversy that the Telugu writer Yarlagadda Lakshmi Prasad's Sahitya Akademi award winning novel *Draupadi* has led to is an example of the stiff resistance to the act of rereading myths.[9] There are charges of obscenity levelled against the author as the novel describes the first night of Draupadi with each of her husbands. Yarlagadda who acquiesces that each writer should play within the rules and that freedom of expression has its limits, also argues that the 'sringara' between a wife and her husband cannot be considered obscene.

Deshpande in 'And What Has Been Decided?' gets into the skin of Draupadi to articulate the idea that Draupadi was happy in her union only with Arjuna and the rest of the Pandavas were thrust upon her. Worse still for Draupadi was the predicament that she never felt she was alone with any one of them. It was as if she were with all the five of them all the time because they always had collective presence. Even Arjuna was not an exception. That was why Draupadi was jealous of Subhadra who could have the whole of Arjuna without a trace of the rest of the Pandavas. If this part of the story deals with the private world of Draupadi, another part of the story deals with the political aspect to argue that Draupadi was more sinned against than sinning. The Pandavas pledged to fight the war saying it was the queen's desire. Draupadi, who already had a vision of the horror of the war, was troubled that she was the cause of the war. However, later she realized that preparations for war had been afloat even before she broached the subject. This puzzled her. She wondered why she was made to feel solely responsible for the war to be fought. Deshpande suggests that a decision that would lead to unimaginable bloodshed was a difficult one to make. Nonetheless, the Pandavas could not have retreated lamely. It was at this juncture that they could use Draupadi as a pawn, shifting the horror of the bloody war on to her shoulders, while absolving themselves of guilt. It is ironic that the decision of the woman who was previously gambled away as a commodity was honoured without a word of protest or persuasion. Thus Dehpande shows that Draupadi who is pictured as a woman of fiery spirit was in reality a woman whose real voice was never heard and real self was never seen.

'Travel Plans' included in *Short Stories* depicts the plight of a woman deceived into marriage with an already married man. Her initial anger against the parents with the suspicion that they would have known the truth while planning their son's marriage evaporates as she witnesses the suffering of her mother-in-law. She is able to establish a

bond with her inlaws even with the main link, that is, the link of their son Sriram, missing. May be she is able to bond with the old couple because of her realization that they are as much deceived by Sriramas she herself is. The *parijata* tree reminds the woman of Krishna's two wives. Although Shashi Deshpande does not elaborate on the story of Krishna and refrains from rereading it, she makes a subtle suggestion that Krishna's polygamy is a tacit license to the modern Indian men to continue with more than one woman in their lives without remorse. The story is also an ironic reference to the man who bears the name of Srirama, revered for monogamy, indulging in bigamy.

'A Wall Is Safer' talks about a woman who follows her husband to a village like Sita accompanying Rama in his Vanvaas. A visit of her friend Sushma, a career woman, disturbs the hornet's nest. The protagonist realizes that the idea of contentment that she has forced herself to believe in is tenuous and false. The wall becomes a metaphor for the unwillingness of people who do not want to see what is on the other side. The final message of the writer is that wall is not a solution when the dangers lie within. Again the implication is although a woman, who is a lawyer, gives up her career, a man will not do the same at any point of time in his career for the sake of the family. The story also has farcical references to a servant woman who is named Sitabai to suit the name of her husband – Ramachandra, who happens to be a drunkard. The reference makes it clear that while every woman is expected to be a Sita, even those men who have the mythological name of Rama are a far cry from Rama's ideals.

The world of Deshpande's short stories which revolves around human experiences makes it clear that the essence of life does not constitute in thinking of ourselves as coherent beings that should be in a position to dissolve existential and intellectual contradictions. Probably the attempt to understand our experience and the

ability to express that understanding as we move on would make life more coherent. And this privilege of making sense out of life is a human need, and hence it should be available to both men and women, with neither being barred from the higher understanding of life and its implications. Although it is true that short stories do not make allowances for the sustained vision which the larger canvas of a novel would, it is equally true that the avalanche of characters, each vivid, vital and different makes the mosaic of the writer's narration intricate and interesting. The 'snippet shots' that the short stories flash, are the outcome of the freak opportunities the writer has made use of while throwing up possibilities of understanding the world around us.

# NOTES

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[1] Chandra Holm, "A Writer of Substance: An Interview with Shashi Deshpande." *Indian Review of Books.* (May 2000) 5.

[2] Shashi Deshpande, *Collected Stories: Volume 1.* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India (P) Ltd., 2003) 207.

[3] Shashi Deshpande, *Collected Stories: Volume 11.* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India (P) Ltd., 2004) 30.

[4] Deshpande, (2003) 120.

[5] Deshpande, (2004) 35.

[6] Deshpande, (2004) 226.

[7] Jasbir Jain, Gendered Realities, Human Spaces: The Writing of Shashi Deshpande. (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2003) 189.

[8] Deshpande, (2003) 88 - 89.

[9] *The Times of India*, (19-2-2010) 10.

# CHAPTER 5

## Critiquing the Works of Vaidehi

Be it the novel, be it the novella, be it the autobiographical writing, be it the short stories, in all the creative works of Vaidehi her motif remains the question of social justice. Interwoven into this humanitarian concern is also the voice of protest against the cultural practices of objectification and victimization of women. That is why the praxis on which Vaidehi's works are modelled remains largely reflective of not only the preoccupation with the personal lives of women but also other social and intellectual issues. Her only novel ***Asprushyaru*** can be taken as a fine example of this feature. In *Asprushyaru* along with the contentious issue of gender, Vaidehi also tackles the inchoate world of caste and the struggle to overcome social and economic deprivations.

The novel *Asprushyaru* begins with a reference to the multi-layered society of India with Shami running out from midwife Mary's house on being offered bread and milk, as Shami has been warned by Parthakka not to accept anything at meat-eaters' place. However, after meeting Mary, Shami's desire to have a bob-cut is whetted and a little while later she also feels that she should have eaten bread at Mary's place. Shami's responses are indicative of the waves of change that influence the younger generation. But Parthakka is annoyed by the mid-wife who carelessly touches her on her way out and in. Parthakka is irritated that Mary who has the *mailige* of a hundred houses is not cautious enough with a woman of the upper caste like Parthakka. The irony is that for child birth the services of Mary are welcome; but it doesn't make her less of an outcast!

If eating at Mary's place is taboo, according to Parthakka, even sighting Narapate, a *thoti* who carries human waste on her head, is inauspicious. Parthakka's conventional and rigid ideas are further evinced in her satisfaction over Rathna delivering before *amavasye*. Parthakka goes to the extent of bathing the children with water purified by cow dung on their return from *Kodigenda* as they had defiled themselves by holding the hand of Situ. Interestingly, it is not only the upper class of Brahmins that is caught in this maze of casteism. Situ herself bathes if she happens to touch a Koraga, still lower on the rungs of caste! Although the upper caste people depend on the lower caste in every walk of life – be it an event as important as child birth or as minor as preparing jack fruit pappadam or as tedious as cleaning a well – the feeling of being superior reins the psyche of the upper caste. Gouramma's household chores are inconceivable without Chandu, the housemaid; Manja, the servant; Mary, the mid-wife; Rukku and Situ the helpmates. Yet these people can never be granted equal status. Gouramma is annoyed at Chandu when Chandu speaks of Narapate as an outcast and she herself as an equal to Gouramma. Nevertheless, when Chandu leaves the house after an altercation and Rukku replaces her, Gouramma is careful with her words with the fear of losing even Rukku at the crucial time of Rathna's confinement period. However, the double-standard prevails. Rukku is expected to perform the burdensome task of cutting the whole jack fruit. But the finer task of separating the fruit from each pod shouldn't be her task!

The locus of thought in the novel is the question, "Who walls in whom and who walls out whom?" It is here that Bhaskara, Parthakka's son comes into question. One can imagine what a blow it must have been for a woman deeply rooted in tradition when her only son, Bhaskara marries a woman of low caste. Her anger is palpable and her dismay discernible. She breaks all ties with Bhaskara, until then the cynosure of attention of the hapless, young widow. Bhaskara explains his marriage to the lower caste woman in terms

of his natural human desire to live with and share the experiences of lower caste people. But along with Kumudini even Bhaskara is rejected by the caste-ridden society. Bhaskara's move of renaming 'Tukri' as 'Kumudini' is futile. However, unlike Parthakka, for whom Kumudini continues to be an untouchable even after her marriage to Bhaskara, Vasudevaraya, despite his upper caste status, does not ostracize his nephew Bhaskara and his wife Kumudini. Vasudevaraya's broadmindedness is also seen in the fact that he respects his daughter Saroja's right to say, 'No' when it comes to the question of matrimony and does not force her into an unwanted union. In Saroja too there are seeds of radical thoughts. The institution of marriage is viewed very differently by her. She opines that if her future husband turns out to be a chauvinist like Rathna's husband, he would be an untouchable as far as the emotional world is concerned. Here, the novelist gives a new twist to the very idea of untouchability. The novel shows how shallow the issue of man-made untouchability is when one takes up the more important question of how one human being responds to another. All those who cannot respect fellow human beings are the real untouchables. In this light the husband who has no respect for his wife and behaves chauvinistically without a thought for her feelings turns out to be an untouchable. Vaidehi's message is clear. Marriage is not merely a union within the confines of caste. It is, instead, a union of minds. If a marriage takes place without breaking the rules of caste, but is solemnized only physically without the union of minds, such a marriage is a farce of the very institution of marriage. That is why her female character Saroja declares boldly that if Bhaskara brings an untouchable who is acceptable to her, she would marry him. Even Sheena, Vasudevaraya's son, who inherits his father's progressive thinking, is sympathetic towards Bhaskara's wife. That is why he can joke with Parthakka when she says that Kusu's fate was written by Brahma on her forehead.

Sheena quips remarking that the situation shows that Brahma himself has no *madi*, a word which stands for the wall between the upper and lower caste people.

Vaidehi looks at the stratified Indian society and the rigidity of the upper caste as an insider as she herself is a Brahmin. It is not the voyeurism of a non-Brahmin looking at the stifling customs to poke fun at. It is the sensitive portrayal of the social reality which makes it clear that very often the perpetrators of wrong-doings are as much victims of tradition as the ones at the receiving end. Can one blame Parthakka, a young widow, whose world is confined to the four walls of the house for what she is? The novel also recognizes the human goodness of women like Gouramma, who despite being caught in rigid religious practices handed down to them, are concerned towards their servants. Notwithstanding these positive examples, Vaidehi is bold enough to question the ones who consciously bring into force inhuman practices. The novel mocks at Brahmins who are staunch followers of ideas like *enjilu* and *musure* which refer to the practice of eating the left-over and defiling things by touching them with the same hand that has touched cooked rice, happily disposing off the left-over to Narapate.

Vaidehi's stand on the caste system further gets elaborated through the words of Bhaskara who observes that if Rama is a Kshatriya, Krishna a Golla, and Valmiki himself a hunter there should be no question of higher and lower castes. The remark implies that the caste system came into existence much later and is indicative of the myopic vision of people who stand for divisive force instead of uniting spirit.

Vasudevaraya's decision to bring pregnant Kumudini home is, in a way, his attempt to fulfil his dream of equality which he didn't have the courage to realize as a youngster. He pleads with Bhaskara to give him the chance to be a human being by caring for Kumudini. Bhaskara, who is initially reluctant, later accedes upholding the

idea of humanism in the place of casteism. But neither Parthakka nor Gouramma is prepared for the change. Both are vociferous in their objection. Parthakka's opposition is stronger. She hides in the attic in her desperate attempt to flee from Vasudevaraya, who, according to her, has now turned an untouchable by bringing Kumudini home. The novel ends with Sheena's sardonic humour that Parthakka tries to establish the supremacy of her upper caste by climbing the lofty height of the loft. Vaidehi perhaps makes indirect references to the ivory tower of the upper caste people.

*Asprushyaru* by Vaidehi can be termed a sociological novel as it deals with a number of social evils. However, even as patriarchy, geriatrics, class struggle and rustic life have a say in the novel, they remain in the periphery and the caste system turns out to be the locus, as indicated by the title. The word 'asprushyaru' when translated to English, means 'untouchables' bringing to one's mind Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable.* The two novels can be studied comparatively to trace the progressive trend in the Indian society as far as the caste system is concerned. The juxtaposition also enables one to understand how individuals can rise above the mundane no matter in which situation and time they are placed.

Unlike Anand's *Untouchable,* in Vaidehi's *Asprushyaru* the protagonist is not an untouchable. In fact, there is no single authorial voice in *Asprushyaru.* Vaidehi does not adopt the stream of consciousness method and the novel turns out to be a kind of palimpsest with different voices surfacing at different times. Anand's title has the word 'untouchable' in the singular, whereas Vaidehi's title 'asprushyaru' is in the plural form. The difference in their approach is immediately evident. If Anand moves from the individual to the general, applying the inductive style of analysis, Vaidehi employs the deductive method of arriving at the particular from the general. The two novels are

juxtaposed to trace the similarities and dissimilarities, which are pointers to the static, regressive or progressive nature of Indian Society as far as the caste system is concerned.

Sociologists have come out with different theories about the origin and development of caste in India. Although there is no consensus about the exact origin of the caste system, there are repeated references to the Varna System in the writings of sociologists. T.B. Bottomore observes that originally the caste groups were the four traditional varnas of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras. In other words, the hierarchical ordering of the groups was of priests, warriors and nobles, traders, and serfs in the descending order of importance. However, they were not totally closed groups; individuals could move from one Varna to another and intermarriage was possible. The jatis or the caste system developed later. With the introduction of the hierarchical caste system, different groups of people involved in performing various social functions essential for the maintenance of society turned out to be closed entities, the higher castes barring the lower castes as untouchables without ascribing to them the dignity of labour. [1]

E.M. Forster in his Preface to Anand's *Untouchable* views Indians as refreshingly frank beings with none of the occidental complexities about functioning, as the Indians accept the process as something necessary and natural, like sleep. However, when it comes to the stratification of society, he opines, "...they have evolved a hideous nightmare unknown to the west: the belief that the products are ritually unclean as well as physically unpleasant and, that those who carry them away or otherwise help to dispose of them are outcasts from society. Really, it takes the human mind to evolve anything so devilish. No animal could have hit on it." [2]

How did such a devilish practice perpetuate itself for centuries? The answer can be linked to the Karma and Dharma doctrines which Indians believe in. Ram Ahuja in

*Indian Social System* surmises that according to the karma doctrine, a man is born in a particular caste because of his actions performed in his previous incarnation. If he had performed better actions, he would have been born in a higher caste, that is, birth in a particular caste is not an accident. He is born in that caste because he deserves to be born there. According to the dharma doctrine, a man, who accepts the caste system and the norms of his particular caste, is living according to dharma, while a man who questions them is violating dharma. Living according to dharma is rewarded while violation of it is punished, both here and hereafter. If man observes the rules of dharma, he will be born in his next birth in a high and rich caste; otherwise he will be born in a low and poor caste.[3] It is the deep-rooted faith in the doctrines of karma and dharma that stifles the voice of both revolt and reform as can be seen in the two novels by Anand and Vaidehi. It is the faith in the divine ordinance that makes Lakha, protagonist Bakha's father in *Untouchable,* console Bakha and speak in favour of the upper caste saying, "...they are really kind. We must realize that it is religion which prevents them from touching us." (78) After almost half a century, Vaidehi's Manja, a worker of the lower caste, does not approve of Vasudevaraya visiting Bhaskara who has committed the sin of marrying an outcast.

There is stratification of another sort too. There are divisions among people of upper and lower castes within their own sects. In *Untouchable* Ram Charan is admitted to be of the higher order among the untouchables because he is a washer man. Chota, the leather worker's son, comes next in the hierarchy, and Bakha is of the third and lowest category as he cleans the dirt of human beings. In *Asprushyaru* Rukku is annoyed that she is made to wash the glass used by Kusa, who although educated, is from the lower caste. The Brahmins have walls among themselves. There is an ongoing debate over the question of superiority among different sects of Shivallis, Kotas, and Sthanikas. The

shallowness of the caste system is mocked at by both the novelists. Vaidehi's doctor who is responsible for Koosa's death by not turning up in time is a combination of Anand's Hakim and the amorous Brahmin priest. Rukku ridicules the doctor who is obsessed with prayers and incantations in the morning to the extent of neglecting his duty, stalking low caste women in the evening. The references are reminiscent of the Hakim who initially refuses to treat Bakha, the outcast, and the Brahmin priest who tries to molest Sohini, the outcast, in *Untouchable*.

Notwithstanding these similarities, we can see that Vaidehi's *Asprushyaru* is less grim than Anand's *Untouchable.* It is understandably so because if Anand's Bakha is the victimized outcast of the rigidly stratified society of the pre-Independence era, Vaidehi's asprushyaru are the comparatively better off lot of the post-Independence age, who, in a way, reflect the realization of the optimism voiced in the concluding part of Anand's otherwise depressing *Untouchable*. In *Asprushyaru,* Kumudini is educated and employed; Kusa, an outcast, speaks English fluently; Seethu has the courage to ask what if she is touched, she is also a human being; and the lower caste women dress like upper caste women and have fanciful names making the upper caste curse the evils of *kaliyuga*. Upper caste people themselves are not without a change for the better. Even in those who are still steeped in traditional beliefs we see progressive trends. In Gouramma we see a direct contrast to Anand's upper caste woman who throws bread on the brick pavement of the gully after extracting work from Bakha. Gouramma pays Manja handsomely for the work he puts in and serves him good food. She does not grudge payment to Koosa and gives her rice on request. She is melancholic on learning about Koosa's death. Her heart goes out to the lower caste woman who had toiled till the day of her death. Parthakka herself is not as rigid as the upper caste woman of Anand who abuses Bakha even after realizing that he had shown humanity in bringing her bleeding son home. Thus, both

Gouramma and Parthakka are examples of changing times even as they exhibit the tension between tradition and modernity.

In *Asprushyaru,* the characters who are central to the question of solution to the problem of untouchability are Bhaskara, Vasudevaraya, Sheena, Shiva and Saroja. They can be viewed in the light of the three possible solutions hinted at by Anand in the concluding part of his *Untouchable.* Anand's novel projects Hutchinson, the Salvation Missionary trying to win over Bakha. But though Bakha is touched at hearing that Jesus Christ receives all men, irrespective of caste, he gets bored, because the missionary cannot tell him who Christ is. There are satirical references to the idea of conversion as a solution to the problem in the novel itself. Gandhi, with his call for equality and brotherhood strikes a cord in the heart of Bakha. But Bakha is impressed with the modest poet too. The poet has nothing to do with God. Unlike Gandhi, he expects no sacrifice from the more fortunate Indians. His solution is simply technology that would introduce the flush system and automatically put an end to the dirty job of carrying and cleaning filth. However, the third solution will not be effective until and unless people free themselves from the strictures which they think are ordained by the scriptures. Vaidehi upholds the Gandhian Model in *Asprushyaru* through different characters. One of her protagonists Bhaskara has long conversations with Vasudevaraya in which he refers to the injustice meted out to the outcasts by the upper castes for centuries and his desire to right the wrong done in whatever capacity he can. Bhaskara also elaborately refers to the invisible forces in society which condition outcasts into believing that they are inferior to the upper caste and that they deserve their lot. Bhaskara's admission that he married a lower caste woman to get an understanding of the lives of the lower caste is akin to Gandhi's followers' attempts to get into the skin of the untouchables by undertaking lowly jobs of cleaning lavatories. The observations made repeatedly in the novel to the

aspect of cleanliness are reminiscent of Gandhi's call to the untouchables to rise above filth by being clean. Bhaskara in *Asprushyaru* has a sense of guilt and remorse over the injustice his ancestors had meted out to the lower castes; Vasudevaraya, who did not have the courage to follow his dream, tries to make up for his failure by supporting Bhaskara; and Sheena, Shiva and Saroja look at Kumudini as a human being and not as an outcast. Among these, Vasudevaraya's struggle is the hardest because like Parthakka and Gouramma, he too is conditioned to accept the stratified society as the order of the day and has his moments of discomfort when he has to transcend the boundary of caste. It is only after a strong effort that he is able to eat what Kumudini cooks. He admits to himself that he would have been happier if Bhaskara had not married Kumudini. He, who has offered coffee to Kusa, an outcast, is unwilling to take him to the inner room. However, that Vasudevaraya is able to overcome these qualms and bring pregnant Kumudini home is the triumph of humanism. It is in these references that Vaidehi's *Asprushyaru* stands for the humanism propagated by Anand in *Untouchable.* Referring to the humanism in Anand's *Untouchable,* Damodar Rao has the following observations to make in the *Afterword* to the novel:

> ...the potential of man not merely to stand apart from the forces of evil, but to wage a struggle against them in order to make life more tolerable. Success may follow if the circumstances are favourable. Though we find ourselves in a tragic universe, life is not merely worth living but worth the struggle to make it more human. There is no need to invoke the old gods, fate or the theory of karma and give up our fight against poverty, ignorance, superstition, exploitation and other evils. What is necessary is a rational outlook, judicious use of science and a strong faith in humanity. (149)

The solution of humanism hinted at by Anand with the introduction of the Gandhian Model in *Untouchable* is concretized by Vaidehi in *Asprushyaru.* The rural set-up in *Asprushyaru* enriched by simple, unassuming people who exhibit insight into life, irrespective of whether they are the educated lot like Bhaskara or the lowly women like the grass-cutter Koosa makes the novel emerge as the 'fiction of ideas'. Vaidehi also has inter-caste marriage as a possible solution to the evils of caste system. In Bhaskara's view the actual untouchables are those whose thoughts and deeds are impure. However, while bringing into the frame-work of the novel her intellectual analysis of the caste system in India, Vaidehi seems to have sacrificed 'prophecy for debate'. Damodar Rao's remarks, although in a different context, can be remembered here:

> A challenge problem before the fiction writer is how to extricate prophecy from debate, how to project his vision of the future without the prop of verbal discussion. This is one of the areas where fiction could perhaps adopt the technique of poetry. If poetry as prophecy can do without verbal debate, there is no reason why, under the compulsions of prophecy, the novel should not, at moments, approximate the condition of poetry. (159)

Bhaskara discusses the origin of the caste system with Vasudevaraya to drive home the idea that the world created by 'Adi Shakthi', the divine power beyond castes, should have been casteless. He refers to the *Ramayana* written by a hunter, received reverentially by all castes as proof to the then casteless society of India. This argument of Bhaskara seems to be a sequel to the speech by Gandhi wherein the Mahatma argues, 'The fact that we address God as "the purifier of the polluted souls" makes it a sin to regard anyone born in Hinduism as polluted.' (135) However, if Gandhi's address set against the hypnotized crowd and eager Bakha has the magic of the poetry in it, Bhaskara's outpouring sounds

pedagogical and pedantic. This, however, in no way, subtracts from the genuine concern of the novelist for social reforms, which, she shows, can be spearheaded by common souls willing to bring about uncommon changes.

**Vaidehi's Short Stories**

The book *Mareyuva Munna* collates the responses of Lankesh to Vaidehi in 1987. It is not surprising that when Lankesh asks one of his colleagues about the writing of Vaidehi, the response is, "Pervagilla," which means that the writing is mediocre, neither excellent nor base. But when Lankesh reads the story sent by Vaidehi for the Diwali Edition, his reaction is contrary to that of his colleague. He exclaims, "Vaidehi eshtu chennagi bareyutthare," which when translated to English reads, "How well Vaidehi writes!"[4] The difference in the responses of these two critics is significant. It is clear that the former was influenced by the trend of his time which viewed all and every piece of women's writing as mediocre just because it happened to revolve around homes and families. But, even at that stage, a few intellectuals like Lankesh could appreciate the significance of the family ideology. Family ideology or domestic ideology, as it gets referred to, is by no means limited. Family is a peephole through which we can get a glimpse of the whole world. Similarly, the world that one gets to see in the works of Vaidehi is, by no means, a shrunken world. It is an astounding world with a variety of characters that lay before the readers an array of truths, easily visible, yet rarely accepted because of the blinkered view of patriarchy. Even a cursory reading of Vaidehi's stories raises disturbing questions and if taken earnestly will lead to serious attempts to reformulate the existing equations in society. For this, it is imperative to follow the different facets of feminism as well as humanism in the works of Vaidehi.

**Sociofeminist Concerns** which oppose social roles imposed on women are effectively brought out in many a short story of Vaidehi. The story 'Gudinolagondu Hakki' depicts how a woman can never come out of conditions, which society and women themselves have woven around women's lives. The narrator exhorts her husband to leave her inside the house and lock it from outside so that she is free of intrusions. The initial euphoria over this concocted freedom soon evaporates and she feels confined inside. The story implies that women's urge for freedom is confined to creating for them free space, inside homes, which, in the first instance, is circumscribed. Signs of freedom outside the locked house are taboo and the narrator herself has no pluck for that. The only thing she finally does is to get ready at the time of the arrival of her husband and wait for him as a conventional wife would do. This conditioning is the outcome of earlier experiences of being chastised for whistling with the reprimand that being the fairer sex she should not have exhibited the indecency of whistling. The protagonist wonders about the import of this injunction and questions if this stricture is to convey the idea that women are not strong enough even to whistle.

'Sougandhiya Swagathagalu' bares before the readers the passions of a single woman who is imprisoned under the garb of decency. Her desire to experience "the new" remains unfulfilled. Vaidehi raises the pertinent question whether all those who are protective towards women are not actually the ones who imprison them.

'Samaja Shastrajneya Tippani' depicts the period of transition from tradition to modernity. Just as there are changes in the wedding customs, there are changes in the attitude of women too. If the traditional women's attitude of acceptance is reflected through Subbakka's character, the attitude of modern girls is shown through Latha, Subbakka's daughter. Vasudevaraya's daughter Varija, like Latha, is conscious of her

inner feelings, but like Subbakka, she too thinks that her father's dictates should be followed. Thus, Varija is reflective of the transition in society which is not yet complete.

'Chippu' centres on the heroine, Yashoda, who is beginning to be aware of her rights as an individual but is caught in the traditional shell – chippu - and behaves in the way which is acceptable to all. Her mother, who is a mere signatory to all that her father plans, and her grand-mother, whose only goal in life is to get the grown up girls out of the family through marriage, are squarely responsible for Yashoda's emotional imprisonment. An influence contrary to this is of her friend, Ushe, a divorcee. The irony of the situation lies in the fact that a girl is left to fend for herself and even decide for herself whether she should walk out on her husband when the marriage is unsuccessful. But the same freedom is denied to her before marriage when it comes to the question of choosing the life partner or for that matter the question if she should marry at all. The girls rightly wonder if the exit point in marriage can be decided by them, why not the entry point? The answer perhaps lies in the Indian tradition of thinking that marriage is the ultimate goal of girls as also the idea that if a girl remains unmarried, it is the sign of the failure of her parents in their role as caretakers. The story shows that such a system can lead to many failed marriages or unhappy marriages. That is why we have Yashi speaking about the necessity of experiencing love which goes deeper than physical attraction in marriage. In spite of all these ideas raging in her mind, she is able to confront, only her mother and not her father. With him she is the usual docile self and even revels in the idea of being an ideal girl. Vaidehi questions this double standard in women and urges them to shed this unnecessary slough which covers their real selves. Vaidehi's attempt is to show that Yashi is not an ideal girl; she is in fact a pointer to what girls ought not to be. The message is not to follow in the footsteps of Yashi who cannot establish her selfhood. The story also makes references to women's right to their body

through Yashi's ruminations. Yashi is determined that her physical contact with her husband, whoever it would be, will be consensual wherein she would have the choice to say 'no'. Although couched in soft expressions and mild language, Vaidehi does rake up the mire of sexual politics in this story.

'Beelu Bheru' has an analogous situation of the family that is trying to get its daughter married also going to examine a buffalo which it wants to buy. Even as the family members ask for a couple of days' time before giving a final word on the buffalo, the boy's party that comes to inspect Indu does not give its verdict immediately. The idea of female as a commodity to be examined and bought is highlighted. The father's word of consolation to Indu, the daughter that he himself had rejected 19 other proposals before agreeing to marry her mother intensifies the daughter's anger. The boy's party anticipates its visit to the household by a couple of days as it wants to club the 'seeing' of a few other girls along with this trip. This surely is a stark contrast to the *swayamvara*, a privilege enjoyed by girls in the Vedic period.

'Ondu Aparadada Tanike' centres on the stigma that is attached to the woman who is separated from her husband. Neither the woman nor the others, who are associated with the woman, have respite from guilt. The guilt is so strong that the narrator visualises Babi as a lawyer questioning her. In fact, Babi who is deceived into marrying a married man, who goes into the second wedlock to get a child, is a contrast to the protagonist, as Babi continues with her unhappy marriage with a polygamous man. She is vocal about her husband's philandering nature where as silence is stamped upon the protagonist. Finally, under duress when she is about to reveal to the world why she left her husband, she finds the judge's seat empty and realises that there is no point in voicing her thoughts. It is clear that a woman who walks out of wedlock is a criminal in the eyes

of society and cannot hope for her case to be heard. If the women characters represent the traditional stand of society, surprisingly, it is the narrator's brother who tries to boost her morale. The story does not delve into the 'why' of the estrangement between the husband and the wife. It only shows that irrespective of the 'why' the woman is invariably made to feel guilty.

'Bhutha' is yet another short story that places before the readers the raw pain of women in unhappy wed locks. Parvathi's pain after separation from a twice married husband is not more than the pain of her mother, Doddamma of the story, who goes through the drudgery of life without complaints only to weep uncontrollably in the middle of the night by the well. For the husband her poignant grief is fuss. The inescapable pain of these two women is evident to the narrator who now realises that the real *bhutha*, the ghost of the house, is the imprisoned spirit of women. The story also suggests that Parvathi who was more like a son would have been an asset to the family if not for the bad luck of being born a girl. Her ability to manage the workers and the fields comes to naught as marriage takes precedence over other priorities and her plain looks - a curse in marriage - makes her parents hurriedly finalise her wedding with a man, who, they discover later, is already a married man.

'Antharalada Badhuku' makes oblique references to a woman who tries to escape 'unwanted sex' in marriage by keeping with her, young girls of her family so that she can escape sleeping with her husband. The speaker who shares her sister Vrinda's opinion that their Chikkamma's overbearing love is annoying, later realizes that it is the ploy of the desperate woman to avoid her husband. Being a reporter, the speaker initially thinks that she has a solid revelation to report, but later realizes that this apple of discord in marriage cannot be revealed to the public. Vaidehi in this story takes up the feminist

agenda of 'rape' in marriage and women's inability to dictate terms and say 'no' to unwanted sex.

'Akku' is a sensitive portrayal of brash Akku who is supposedly mad. But the story, in fact, is a curtain raiser to the ugliness of the hypocritical society. The tragedy that unfolds before us is of a girl who is abandoned by her husband and loses her mental balance. She is often the laughing stock of the family and at times the cause of its embarrassment. The truths she points out are unacceptable to the hypocritical society and she is made to shut up, quite often, with sound thrashings on the mouth that has blasphemed. Even her own parents, exasperated by her crudeness, have neither sympathy nor patience while dealing with the brashness of Akku. However, Akku's refusal to reconcile with the husband fudges the line of difference between sanity and insanity and shows Akku as the one who goes by her own rules of the game with enviable autonomy. Even as she remains 'mad' to the rest of the world, the novelist makes the readers see the absence of fairness in the world that we inhabit. Vaidehi at various points has discussed the signs of mental aberration in women who are wronged by patriarchy. If becoming *manku* is one such sign, getting possessed is another. People easily dismiss the frustration of women who get possessed by saying that if two pitchers of water are decanted onto the head of such a woman, normalcy would be restored.

'Shodha' is on the search undertaken by Krishna for her childhood friend Bharathi whom she has lost behind the doors of a palatial mansion. Although the nature of Bharathi's tragedy is not explicated in the story, it is clear that her dreams of living the life of a princess are shattered. The story makes oblique references to the possibility of many an upsetting occurrence behind the doors of magnificent bungalows. The relieving feature of the story is the speaker's attempts to re-establish the bond with her friend and

her assertion that the most valuable aspect of life lies in the beauty of friendship or human relationships. There is also the hint of the possibility of the eccentric old woman, who directs Krishna to the dilapidated house, being Bharathi herself. Vaidehi, on a number of occasions, has reiterated the sordid truth that women who are oppressed turn out to be *manku*, which is a mild word for madness.

'Oata' is about the sad plight of a woman whose existence is brought to the consciousness of others through her cries of pain when tortured by her husband. The irony lies in the fact that not a single person in that supposedly decent colony does anything about the situation. Vaidehi draws the attention of the readers to the general trend of non-involvement. Everyone believes in the idea that it is better not to spread filth by hitting it. Vaidehi's mute question is if it is possible to exterminate filth. The implicit answer in the story is negative as with every one of us the refrain is to safeguard ourselves. Saroja, the speaker, despite her strong feelings for the suffering woman, ends up doing nothing. She is warned by her neighbours and her husband not to get involved. Even Pandithamma, who is fond of interacting with people, is scared of the villainous husband of the suffering woman and doesn't get involved. The woman dies, may be after a cruel act by the husband, and the chapter gets closed. As far as the rest of the people are concerned, life continues in the routine manner for them. Ordinarily even those of us, who are moved by the sorry plight of such women, do not attempt to bring light in their lives by extending a hand of help. It is as though every one waits for a Mahatma or a Mother Theresa to be born to eradicate social evils. Vaidehi, in this story, as in 'Bassinolagondu Rajakiya', suggests that it is the duty of every one of us to fight injustice whether it is at the domestic, social or political level. If each is to one's own self, and if no one has courage to oppose atrocities, life has no meaning. In the course of her narration, Vaidehi wonders whether this story too will get bracketed as the writing

revolving around male atrocities against women. This reference, though casual, is significant. First of all it shows how inevitable it is for women writers to write about the troubles and travails of women. Secondly, it highlights how unfair it is to categorize such writers as parochial in their concern for women instead of recognizing that theirs is the concern for the whole of civilization.

'Thereyada Putagalu' makes very subtle suggestions of Rajatthe's life being not as idyllic as she projects it to be. She cannot bear the sight of her dead husband's harmonium and she repeatedly makes references to the relationship between a girl and a boy ending in a rape while watching T.V. serials. Was she raped before or on the *shobhana* day, the day or rather the night that consummates a marriage? Set against the *shobhana* of Sukanya, the story heightens the element of mystery about Rajatthe's *shobhana* and her description that everything was 'over' on the day of the *shobhana* makes one wonder whether it is a reference to the crushing of the tender feelings of the girl by the husband on the *shobhana* day. The story seems to be making subtle references to marital rape. Vaidehi doesn't want to make the meaning clear and as referred to by the title, the pages remain closed and the exact meaning cannot be deciphered by the story.

'Krauncha Pakshigalu' has the interesting plot of Arundhathi and Anitha interviewing Vishakha Ben, a freedom fighter. It is in the course of the interview that the interviewers come to know that Vishakha Ben's cook's name is Lakshmamma. The name triggers off the memory of Ashnarna Bhatta who is well-remembered for his grief over his wife's disappearance at the time of partition in Delhi, where he had kept a hotel. He had desperately searched for his wife after she had been abducted by Muslims. But the search had come to no use. Although he had remarried and begotten four children, he was always grief-stricken over the loss of his first wife so much so that people often called

him – *krauncha pakshi* – the saurus crane, famed for its love for the partner. The first twist in the story comes when the interviewers learn from Lakshmamma that the Bhatta had found her in the refugee camp, but had refused to identify her and had walked out on her even as she had desperately run behind him. To her good fortune, she had found a saviour in Vishakha Ben. But in the course of her revelation, she wonders whether the plight of those women who had decided to stay back in Pakistan with the new men in their lives wasn't better than her own. The setting of Ayodhya, where the incident takes place brings in parallels between Sita, who was rejected by Rama and Lakshmamma, who was spurned by her husband. The story raises the question, if a woman who is unaware of her husband's whereabouts for a year would also be given the opportunity of not accepting him. The answer is always in the negative and this is a pointer to the male-oriented structure of society.

'Dhali' operates at different levels. On the one hand it shows how women, who are targeted with abuses and vulgar comments, provide easy entertainment to the travellers in a bus, with even the ones who disapprove of the indecent behaviour of the conductor abstaining from confronting him. On the other, the story shows how the very silence of women can act as a weapon. The girl who is at the receiving end of the abuses of the conductor has a strange weapon to use. She keeps smiling while insults are being hurled at her and the conductor finally can take it no more. Her smile, without a single word of protest or anger upsets him so much that he reaches the stage of asking her directly for the reason for the smile. Not given a response, his impatience grows till he loses control over himself. While opening and shutting the door violently as a mark of his anger, he loses balance and falls off even as the girl continues to smile. Vaidehi through this not very uncommon incident points out the shallow pride of men who try to hurt women with barbed words. Conductors who have temporary power in their hands try to

show their supremacy. Society seems to be unfair towards women in every walk of life, but women work out their own devious plans and plots to retaliate. The title *dhali* which means attack is symbolic of unprovoked attack of men on women – the order of the day in every society. 'Nakko ... Na ...' from Vaidehi's *Meju Msatthu Badagi* can be remembered here. The piece is a powerful statement on male domination over the female which is an off-shoot of the feeling of being inferior. The piece covers a simple incident of the husband alighting from the train, wrongly assuming the station to be *Rathnagiri*. The wife tells him repeatedly that it is not *Rathnagiri* and pleads with him to get back. Although she is right, she is rewarded with slaps simply because the husband is insulted to be proved wrong! Even as the wife is embarrassed, she smirks as she can understand her husband's psychology. Vaidehi too, as the narrator, sneers at the male ego that finds it impossible to concede defeat. The situation is reflective of the male-female equation in society.

'Nati' captures the prowess of Ratna who is able to imitate all and sundry. She is the source of entertainment in a wedding house. Interwoven with the references to her acting ability are the satirical references to people who don't mind laughing at others but cannot digest the idea of being laughed at. The prime point of the story lies in the fact that when Ratna poses as an imitator, she is hiding the pain of her real life in which she has undergone the trauma of cremating her own daughter in the absence of her husband, whose whereabouts are not known to her as he detested being questioned. Thus, the story shows that there can be underlying pathos in the lives of people whom the whole world views as entertainers. The protagonist of 'Nati' is an actor in reel and real life.

'Abha' is about a seemingly forward woman, who smokes, drinks and apparently lives life according to the shots she calls. But behind the façade is trapped an insecure

woman, anxious about ageing. Vaidehi seems to make subtle references to lesbian tendencies in this story.

Stories like 'Alivu Ulivugala Naduve' and 'Jathre' are deceptively simple. 'Alivu...' covers the fragmented reminiscences of Mookathe. Her memories of the past are triggered off by the visit of Vasu Mania who declares that he has built a palatial house in the place of his old home. The reference sets on motion Mookathe's remembrances of the house, some positive, some negative, but all making her regret the idea that the house with which all these thoughts are associated is being demolished. What runs through as leit motif in all the reminiscences is the sad world of women. Nagamajji who fiercely protected the gold that she could never wear because of skin disease, the newly married Subhi who could not share her thoughts with anyone in the new household, Paniammajji whose daily routine was to bemoan the ill treatment from her son and daughter-in-law, Mookathe herself who never had fine saris to wear in her youthful days, all expose different facets of women's not so happy lives, layer by layer. Men who remain at the periphery are either too dominating like Ajjayya, Kitta Mavayya and Vasu Mani or non-descript like Mookathe's husband. But Vaidehi sardonically points out the shallowness of domination by referring to Ajjayya's wife who refuses to get her head tonsured when Ajjayya dies. The wife is brash enough to say that if Ajjayya has to go to hell because of this act of hers, he may as well go to hell. Mookathe initially wonders why Ajji hadn't shown the same courage when Thimmakka was tonsured. But later Mookathe herself realizes that the seeds of revolt which must have been sown in the heart of Ajji at that moment would have later sprouted in active rebellion. Vaidehi here suggests that women's revolt may take time to surface because of suppression, but will come up sooner or later. Kitta Mava who had declared that women of the house did not need to have rooms of their own, ensures that no one uses his room even when he is away. But as fate

would have it, he never comes back to claim the room of his own. To Vasu Mani for whom women's talk is *chayya chayya*, which means nagging in Kannada, Mookathe has a word of caution. She mentally chides him that instead of demolishing the old house, it is better that he destroys the pride in his heart. As in other stories, in this story too, what comes as a relieving feature is the healthy relationship between Mookathe and her daughter-in-law, Saroja. Vaidehi over and over again debunks the myth that women are enemies of women by repeatedly referring to relationships in which women feel for one another or situations in which mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are compassionate towards each other. This she does in a matter-of-fact style without a single element of romanticism or sensationalism. Vaidehi also introduces the idea of the soul continuing to live through memories in the hearts of people with Mookathe's avowal that if she is to be considered dead, it will take many generations because until then she would be recurrently present in the reminiscences of people. Vaidehi's women characters, even the ones from the rural set-up, are strong. They are self-willed as in the case of Athe, Nagappa's wife, of 'Yathre'. She is resolute in attending the Polali Jathre and does so even when the disapproving husband throws a piece of faggot at her. Athe attends the Jathre even as her leg bleeds. However, the crack of the phallocratic society becomes evident when in her last confinement she becomes a victim of hysteria and dies. Nagappa weeps over the dead body calling her his 'Bhagyalakshmi' although when she was alive he had not used any such term of endearment.

'Bharee Ondu Pettige' ends without offering a definitive explanation as to why Doddamma desperately wants to possess a wooden box and as to why Chithi, who is otherwise willing to sell the box, is adamant that it doesn't go to Doddamma. The enmity between the two women is evident, but not the reason. Different sources that profess to know the truth come up with different stories. The stories revolve around different

versions such as the box being a gift to Doddamma from her Mama's son; the box being used to hide a dead body; the box being used to hide a prostitute etc. But neither Chithi nor Doddamma reveals the secret. Doddamma, however, possesses the box by cunning. She cons Chithi into selling it to Sanjivi from whom Doddamma buys it for double the amount. When questioned on the importance of the box, Doddamma's only response is that she has the right to desire a box as also the right to privacy. Whatever the significance of the box might be, it turns out to be a symbol for many a secret that women hide in the box of silence.

'Vilakshana' shows how even an oddity, deplored by one, can be an attraction for another. Devatthe leaves her husband, Narayana, comparing him to a falcon and the husband, goes to the Himalayas to become a sanyasi as he is unable to stomach the insult. But as his driving force is humiliation and not the spirit of renunciation, he is advised to go back to the material world and venture into anything of his interest. Narayana, who begins as a hotelier, turns out to be a big entrepreneur, but continues to shun women. For Shanthakka, a much-married woman, this turns out to be a fascination and her desire is to lock her eyes with his. This urge continues even after Narayana becomes a sanyasi, this time with the true spirit of renunciation. But the minute Shanthakka comes to know that Devatthe, the long-separated wife of Narayanarayaru, at present known as Ananda Swami, is in town and that she has attended the preaching of Narayana Guru in Madras on a daily basis, Shanthakka loses all her interest in meeting Narayana. Thus, the story throws light on the odd equations in the chemistry between a male and a female.

In 'Ogatu' Shubha aunty remains a riddle to the speaker and the readers. Shubha aunty who is a perfect wife and daughter-in-law is enigmatic to others because she has never made a visit to anybody's place. But the same Shubha aunty surprises the speaker

by visiting her unannounced. She further astonishes the speaker by being outside the house for the whole day without revealing anything about her whereabouts. However, one point is clear; she has confidence in the speaker and knows that the secret will not be let out. Vaidehi seems to suggest and also approve of the private self a woman may have or needs to have.

Prominent among works voicing **semio-feminism** based on the science of signs is 'Shakunthaleyondige Kaleda Aparahna'. Different from the rest of the stories, it rereads the mythological story of Shakunthala. If the original story definitely poses Shakunthala as the victim of fate, Vaidehi wants to show that it is not fate but *hubris* in the character of Dhushyantha that is the reason for the tragic plight of Shakunthala. Dhushyantha's amnesia is not the outcome of a curse but the conscious choice made by the king who in his role as king is devoid of human emotions and passions. His human self comes to the forefront when he goes hunting and Shakunthala finds in him a tender, romantic lover. However, even then she can see cracks in his character, which she refuses to acknowledge as her yearning for Dhushyantha is as strong as his desire for her. She wonders if it was the bee that roamed around her or whether it was she who roamed around the bee. Shakunthala admits that she needed Dhushyantha and was prepared to overlook the other women in his life. Even when he dreamt of other women, Shakunthala had consoled herself with the idea that they were not physically present there at that moment. Even the stories of other women in his life only made her long to see them instead of evoking in her the usual feelings of jealousy and anger. Vaidehi gives a major twist to the original story by making Shakunthala accuse Kalidasa as the fabricator of the story of the curse of Dhurvasa. Shakunthala reaffirms Dhurvasa`s fatherly love for her and concludes that Kalidasa, a male writer, comes up with his version of the curse which is a ploy to cover the irresponsible behaviour of men. Vaidehi

also makes Shakunthala ponder over the question whether the world will believe Shakunthala's version as readily as it believed the colourful lies of Kalidasa. Dhurvasa is pictured as a loving, avuncular figure who is angry not at Shakunthala but at Dushyantha as he can see through his act of forgetfulness. In fact, it is Dhurvasa who urges Shakunthala to present the ring with the royal insignia if the need comes. Shakunthala doesn't lose the ring, but chooses not to show it because she has seen through the deceit of Dushyantha. It is at this point when she turns her back to Dushyantha and cannot tread the path to Kanvashrama that Shakunthala matures emotionally. She is her own guru and she is her own disciple. It is this self-dependent Shakunthala who gives birth to Bharatha. It is also at this juncture that Dushyantha reappears in the life of Shakunthala. Shakunthala asks him hesitantly if he remembers her. It is at this moment the facade is removed and Dushyantha reveals to her what an opportunist he had been. Surprisingly Shakunthala feels no disgust and continues to love him. But she has grown old enough to understand the worldly ways of the king and the sordid truth that she is not an integral part of his life. It is at this moment of realisation that she refuses to go with Dushyantha. It is not the usual reason of jealousy of the other women in his life that makes Shakunthala stay back. It is that weakness in the nature of the king who can neither give himself fully to another nor accept another fully that makes Shakunthala stay back. She is prepared to face the rest of her life with the philosophy of EACH ONE TO ONE'S OWN SELF. While rereading the myth from Shakunthala's point of view, Vaidehi deconstructs the traditional image of Dushyantha. He is postured as a king who is aware of every move he makes and makes it without remorse. Mature Shakunthala understands that Dushyantha does what the world has conditioned him to do. That is why she is not repulsed by Dushyantha. But she is a woman of dignity who defies the conditioning of the world by declining to go with Dushyantha.

'Ondu Bhagila Saddhu' is a bold questioning of the stricture that bars women from touching the sacred stone – *Saligrama.* At the very outset Vaidehi, questions the origin of such strictures. She challenges people who quote *Brihannaradhiya, Padma Purana* etc. as the basis for such strictures. Although she doesn't delve deep into the origin of these books themselves, by declaring that she *chose* to touch the *saligrama*, Vaidehi dismisses the authority and authenticity of such writings. The practice of grouping women with low caste people, eunuchs and immoral people also comes under the scanner of Vaidehi. She continues to make both direct and oblique references to practices which relentlessly condition women into living a soundless existence. Women are trained even to shut doors silently. Questioning the Sanskrit line, "*Sthree nam vaivadhikaro vijneya shalagrama shilarchane"* which decrees that menstruating women, married women and women who haven't reached the stage of menopause should not touch the *saligrama,* Vaidehi once again challenges the irrational practice. But the note of revolt is loud and clear when the speaker challenges the Acharyas, the learned men, by declaring that she touched and defiled the *saligrama.* The desire to touch the *saligrama* had erupted in her when she had learnt that Chandrahasa used to roam about with the *saligrama* in his mouth. However, she had to suppress the desire along with many other desires, which was typical of growing girls. Nevertheless, one evening, after prayers, when she opens her eyes and glimpses the box in which *saligrama* is kept, her desire erupts again. Unable to curb the strong desire, she takes the box. On hearing the question as to what she is doing behind the closed door, the speaker is troubled. She, however, cannot decipher whether the question is posed by men, women, or her own self. This suggests that restrictions imposed by men are perpetuated and internalized by women. When the sound persists, the confused speaker touches the *saligrama* and the next moment she even hides it in the mouth. The strength of the story lies in the fact that after

this sacrilegious act, instead of feeling guilty, the speaker feels light and liberated. Remarkably, contrary to what she had heard, there is no untoward happening either. This is Vaidehi's way of showing that certain taboos imposed on women should be broken by women themselves if women are to be truly liberated. This stand of Vaidehi can be traced back to her childhood experience, mentioned in 'Aha! Aa Atada Bayalu' in which while continuing with nostalgic memories of the school, the playground and the games played, Vaidehi points out that volley ball had remained a male domain. As a girl who played throw ball, the question had come to her mind though she had never raised it. This silence is typical of girls who remain mute about many other issues as well.

'Mareyadavaru' has the phantasmagoric faces of various men who have come into the life of the speaker in her awareness of herself as a woman. The impression, all these leave the woman with, is that it is the body that matters. The speaker indirectly suggests that since it is not so in the case of women, they spend half their lives in choosing their men and naturally do not find it easy to sleep with men. The speaker wryly adds that to ease their torment women are denied the question of choice itself. Ultimately even the man she chooses does not leave her with a sense of security. She feels that the man who stands smiling with his hands on his hips can be provided with the buttermilk churner. The reference is to the image of Krishna and the licence men seem to take in following the cult of having more than one woman in their lives, being influenced by the image.

**Psycofeminism** which deals with the concept of female sexuality is not elided in the works of Vaidehi. 'Antharangada Putagalu' depicts the unfulfilled desire of a girl to find a man of her love and imagination. Achala remains single even as all her friends, much less attractive than she, get married one by one. None of their marriages can be described as ideal. Vijaya has no shine in her eyes even as she prepares for her son's

thread ceremony; Saritha is at the receiving end of her husband's scorn as she is not able to give him a son even after the third pregnancy and Manjula goes in for extra-marital affair, not finding satisfaction in her husband. But shockingly it is Manjula who shows to Achala the alternative to saying 'no' to an unwanted marriage. Manjula is bold enough to find fulfillment even after being married to a man who is not of her choice, by sleeping with a man of her choice. The story suggests that Achala may marry Venkat although he evokes no sense of romance in her. She describes her placcid response as the absence of the desire to bear his child. Achala has grown wiser after hearing about Manjula's escapade. Although she still doesn't have the courage of the maid, Subbi, who has a child outside wedlock, and carries on with life nonchallantly, Achala is now armed with the ploy of Manjula to turn an unsuccessful marriage into a fulfilling one. While the title highlights the little secrets of women, the idea that girls who used to laugh in an unbridled manner, don't do that as they grow older is a pointer to the pensive mood that embraces girls as they grow older, making them lose their spontaneity.

'Chandale' makes a comparative study of women who are immoral by compulsion, women who have the courage to be immoral because they choose that easy life and women who remain virtuous in spite of their admiration for licentious behaviour. With the last type, it is evident that superficially although virtue is upheld, deep within there is the urge to enjoy pleasures which have hitherto been denied to them.

In 'Atha', a pair of eyes that stares at the protagonist Suma who is just married evokes mixed feelings in her. On the one hand if she is attracted by the eyes, on the other she wants to be protected against them. She desperately waits for her husband to come back to the bus to escape the intruding eyes, although initially she herself had felt flattered by them. The story shows the natural attraction between the opposite sexes and

the women escaping the same behind the protection of wedlock although the experience leaves them with a sense of loss.

'Avalu Mathu Male' describes a woman who is in the company of a man, evidently interested in having a fling with her. His talk makes it clear that he is one of those men who believe in the metaphor of a man being an ocean and women, rivers, which flow into the ocean. However, the woman disappears suddenly and the man who was planning to take her to a Travellers Bungalow is left puzzled. The concluding part of the story refers to the same woman in the company of her husband. There is a possibility of the whole episode being a dream and the woman enjoying the physical contact with the husband with the thoughts of another man. Vaidehi seems to invert the myth of the ocean and the rivers. Although societal norms make it possible for a male to consider himself the superior ocean into which all rivers merge. no social mores can control the imaginary world of women. Thus, women turn out to be as liberated as men themselves in their claim to physical pleasure.

Vaidehi places women in the economic framework of society too. This shows strains of **Marxist-feminism** in the writings of Vaidehi. Vaidehi is at her best when she takes up the struggle of the poor for survival. It could be noted that we don't experience the realism and potency which are the striking features of these stories when we read her stories on romance, man-woman relationship or fantasy. Her forte is the poignant description of strife and struggle for survival.

'Puttamathe Mathu Mommagalu' is a story which highlights the repercussions of being economically backward. Women who are cursed with poverty have no choice to make and if they hope to stand on their own feet, their dream is systematically destroyed by a society which is an instrument of exploitation. The question raised by the story is,

"Whose plight is worse? Is it Puttamathe's, who accepts her lot and works endlessly going through life austerely without a single desire, or is it her grand daughter's, who is audacious enough to hope that the world will come around and give her the due?" Kamalavathi spurns Parameshwar's suggestion to marry Marianna with the hope of finding a boy of her choice. But she realises that all such romantic ideals are possible only in movies. Her anger is impotent and she can overcome it only by fanning herself. The story unfolds before the readers the sad plight of five generations of women – Puttamathe's grandmother who has to undergo the pain of her daughter being hurled into the well by her husband; Puttamathe who has to witness the death of her daughter and has to look after her grand daughter whose father is only too happy to abandon the child and the grandchild Kamalavathi who wants to offer to her grandmother some comfort in reciprocation to all that she has received, but is unable as she herself is victimized by the factory owner, who builds a palatial home for himself while offering no increment to his employees in four long years. Her courage is a contrast to the timidity of Puttamathe, who had no nerves to go to court on coming to know about her husband's murder by the hotel owner. Puttamathe aborts Kamalavathi's education after seventh standard being worried about the criticism of others despite the fact that Kamalavathi is brilliant and is likely to get a scholarship. Puttamathe's attempts to escape slander are futile because Kamalavathi faces bigger flak for joining a ready made garment shop. In fact, the only groom, whom Kamalavathi approves of, rejects her because of such rumours about Kamalavathi. The question Vaidehi seems to raise is whether the lot of Kamalavathi or Puttamathe would have been better if Kamalavathi had been educated. Although Vaidehi does not offer education as panacea for all problems, she touches upon the possibility of it being an answer to women's oppression.

'Hakkilladavaru' ironically assigns to its central character the name 'Siri' which in Kannada means wealth. Siri is the poverty-stricken woman deserted by her husband, fending for herself while also looking after her old mother, retarded sister, young daughter and son. She is the very epitome of strength with never-die-hard spirit. She is not only loud mouthed but also foul mouthed. Delicacy and sensitivity are words which do not figure in her lexicon. She is not one of those women who suffer silently. She nags and complains. But does that make her situation less pathetic than the silently suffering women portrayed by many women writers? The scars are vivid and the hurt deep because being loud mouthed she foments incisive remarks and gets hurt even more badly. She can match insult with insult, abuse with abuse, sarcasm with sarcasm. But it does not help her in anyway. The readers' heart goes out to this woman whose abilities in the rural set-up go unacknowledged where as the prowess of her cousin Madhuri who can drive a car is eulogised. The story is remarkable for its characterisation. Padda Mavayya is the typical father gloating over the achievements of his children while being least sensitive to the troubles of Siri. He is like an egg, too full of himself, shallow and vain. Venu Mava is sensitive, feels for the underdogs but does nothing to ease the situation. Jalaja Mai is natural and human. She has her share of compassion although a little brusque at times. The young women madhura and Madhuri, with whom Siri in her younger days had spent lovely time, have absolutely no sense of bonding with her. Doddathe has retained her calm and ability to love the family members despite trying circumstances. Although she too is brash towards Siri, it is clear that it is the ease and liberty of a mother towards her daughter with whom she has shared her flesh and blood. Radha, a retarded transgender, aggravates the hopelessness of the situation. The little children Ramanatha and Savitha without the cynicism of their mother are enamoured by their rich cousins. On the brighter side the description of Ramanatha bringing pepper mint for his Ajji everyday shows the

sweetness of the family bond. The story satirises the visit of Padda Mama and his brood. It is pointed out that such visits are for self-gratification of patting one's own back and saying, 'Look... how good I'm...I visited my old sister.' There is the self deception of carrying a pack of chocolates as if it were a magnanimous gesture. There are absolutely no qualms about making a struggling woman treat them with tender coconuts which contribute towards her very sustenance. The story is so moving that it can make the readers retrospect about the possibility of similar shallowness in their own lives. As remarked earlier Vaidehi's talent as a writer blazes forth when she depicts the extraordinary struggle of ordinary people for survival. In her writing there is no philosophical observation, no intellectual sparring, no intense psychological drama, but depiction of life itself with all its bareness and reality. Vaidehi's is a living philosophy.

In 'Avalambitharu' Vaidehi does it again. Completely free of melodrama, realistic to the core, 'Avalambitharu' projects selfishness in all its ugly hues. If Sharada is exploitative in nature, the narrator despite her sympathetic attitude towards the maid Ahalya refrains from doing good because of the fear of spoiling her equations with a neighbour. The ease with which the little child gets adjusted to the new girl after being looked after by Ahalya, as though she were the child's mother, is a pointer to the ephemeral nature of human relationships. In the case of the child, if it is instinctive, in the case of adults it is deliberate because they are happy to stay connected with those people who pose no complications or those who are necessary entities on the list of contacts. 'Avalambitharu' also throws light on the sad plight of the uneducated lot like Ahalya's mother who are taken for a ride by people like Sharada. In such a situation, it is Ahalya, who stands tall as a girl, aware of her worth, conscious of her rights and hopeful of a better future. The fiery spirit of Ahalya is the refreshing feature of the story. Vaidehi breaks the stereotypical portrayal of the exploited and the exploiter.

'Yariddhare Elli' details the travails of a spinster who has agreed to look after an old man on being promised a share in his property. Her attempts to get married, even with the problem of having to offer a dowry, remain unrealized. The focus of the story is also the pathetic situation of the girl who is desperate to bond with people and thinks of the narrator and Ramanayya as people close to her. The narrator has no such feelings and this makes the situation of the girl in the eyes of the readers, pitiable. When viewed from this angle, this story too comes out as one of the narrations upholding the recurrent theme of the economic dependence of the poor and their unfulfilled desire to get accepted in the inner circle of the rich. The poor are invariably shunned, but they weave around themselves delusions of grandeur without realizing that they are the ones who can be considered, *elliyoo salladavaru* which means 'people who belong no where.'

'Babuli, Thayee Matthu Naseebu' is a heart-wrenching story of a woman who through out her life works like a machine earning for herself the title of a miser to repay the loan taken on a house, only to give it all up for a toss because of the wrong idea that the house wouldn't fetch a better price as it has no road approach. The unreasonably low price is a shocker even to the buyer. But by the time the seller, Babuli's mother, realizes it, it is too late and no amount of cajoling, whining and warning can make the buyer give the seller any extra amount. Babuli, who was made to do things which went against her self-pride by her mother in her bid to save, gets from life nothing but ridicule of her college-mates. Perhaps it is her desperation for recognition that makes her contest elections which she loses. Nevertheless, she is determined to contest again. The speaker, who has always had a soft corner for Babuli and her mother, is greatly moved by the sorry plight of these wretched women and is disgusted by Vathsala and her husband, who gloat over their success at getting the house at a shockingly low price. It is easy for Vathsala and Ramesh to dismiss the whole transaction by attributing it to their good luck

and of course the bad luck of Babuli's mother. It is at this point that the speaker almost angrily avers that if luck, *naseebu,* is on Babuli's side, she will certainly win the election. By bringing the word *naseebu,* which means luck or fortune or fate in the title, Vaidehi evokes the pathos of the readers about the plight of the poor. The irony is that no matter how hard the poor try, their *naseebu* never transforms itself into good fortune. Vaidehi seems to question the injustice that exists in society in the very equations between the rich and the poor.

'Gulabi Talkies Mathu Sanna Alegalu' depicts how a single incident can change the economic face of the women of the village. The film theatre that comes to the village not only brings women out of the confines of the four walls but also gives them the courage to defy their men folk occasionally. Interwoven into the social fabric are the two women, Gulabi and Lilly, both rebels of some sort or other. If Gulabi who runs away from the village, comes back to improve it, Lilly, a midwife, who gets the job of the woman gate-keeper, sows the seeds of desire in the hearts of women to be economically independent. Although she is corrupt, her corruption in comparison with the corruption of the cloth merchant, who lives a luxurious life, is venal as what she gets is barely enough for her needs. However, the story ends with Lilly going back to midwifery as she is sacked from the job. This is suggestive of the fact that this is a man's world after all.

'Ammacchiyemba Nenapu' is on the invincible spirit of Ammacchi, whose mother Veeratthe, as a young widow, had taken help from a twelve year old Venkappayya. Venkappayya establishes his right over the mother and the daughter and takes for granted the idea that Ammacchi is his possession. There is constant bickering between the two and Venkappayya's anger at being unable to bring Ammacchi under his control keeps mounting. He aborts all that Ammacchi finds pleasurable. He objects to

Ammacchi visiting Shambhu Bhatta's place. He thwarts Ammacchi's attempts to wear a back-button blouse by instructing Rama teacher to stitch it the usual way. Ammacchi, who is all excited about the new blouse, is in for a shock on realizing that Venkappayya has preempted her move. She swallows her anger and waits for an opportune moment to hit back. When Venkappayya is away at Thirupathi, she changes his shirt to a back button one. But alas! Even fiery Ammacchi, who has a barb for every remark of Venkappayya, is taken unawares by his physical, sexual assault, although behind closed doors, in the presence of her mother and the little girl, the narrator. The news spreads like wild fire and circumstances force Ammacchi to marry Venkappayya. They settle in Thirupathi where Venkappaya owns a hotel. Ammacchi returns with a trunk to announce that Venkappayya had committed suicide. Although she is her usual, talkative self, her uninterested response to the visit of Shesha, Shambhu Bhatta's son, who used to interest her, is suggestive of a hardened woman, devoid of dreams. The episode of turning a front button shirt to that of back button is significant as it proclaims that if dress code is prescribed for women, it can be imposed on men too.

'Maduve – Hennu – Seere' is a touching account of the desperate but futile attempts of the poor to build equations with the rich. Suma is invited to the wedding of her rich cousin and attends it although it makes a dent in her purse. She returns crestfallen when in the gala wedding nobody has time for her. Her new sari goes unnoticed and she returns with the realisation that perhaps her absence rather than presence would have been noticed more because some time or another at least some one would have remembered that she hadn't attended the wedding.

'O! Jagathe!' has Vaidehi's favourite theme of the divide between the poor and the rich. The tragic element of the story lies in the fact that if the narrator's maid has

ken from her Rs.300 out of her earning to treat her ailing son, the narrator's friend, the octor's wife shows off her sari which coincidentally is of the same amount. The pathetic ate of the poor is further heightened by the sad situation of the death of the boy. The ignity of the maid who faces life against all ordeals is contrasted against the frivolity of he doctor's wife whose life revolves around money, sari and jewellery.

'Chikkana Sathyagraha' is another story which evokes the pathos of the reader bout the plight of the labour-class women. Chikka is initially happy that in the ompound adjacent to her house a palatial house is coming up. She even makes petty ash by collecting and selling cement bags, iron pieces etc. pilfered from the construction te. This contentment is short-lived as a newly appointed supervisor starts guarding the lace like a hawk. The second unpleasantness for Chikka is her realization that the huge ructure completely blocks her home from getting breeze. But the worst blow comes hen the inmates of the new house throw their rubbish into the compound of Chikka on ot only the house-warming day but also the days to follow, on a routine basis. Chikka's ehement protest comes to nothing. Chikka can turn to no one for help as her husband is useless man and her son a drunkard. The policeman Hirekudru Bhaskar is nowhere to e seen. When Chikka's daughter retaliates by throwing the rubbish back into the ompound of the perpetrators, she is intimidated by a male of the house who brandishes a fle. The inmates of the house make matters worse by exhibiting their disgust at each ember of Chikka's family. Chikka gets no solace from even Suvarnamma for whom hikka works. The story ends symbolically with Suvarnamma closing the door on hikka after admonishing her not to shout and the speaker herself shutting the door on hikka. This is one more story which conveys the message that when the poor are in ouble, every door is shut on them.

'Allallina Lokadhavaru' has the twin purpose of dealing with the stratification that exists in the name of caste and gender in the Indian society. We see that Manji, a low caste woman working in a Brahmin household, is a brave heart who, after a failed suicide attempt, has bounced back to life. This story too, like many others, is on the plight of an abandoned woman. The part subtitled 'Manji Gulaganji' depicts how the low caste people dream of being born as Brahmins at least in their next birth. The story briefly discusses gender politics when Manji is praised on being equal to men. Another maid Gowri is annoyed by this comparison and remarks that no matter how efficient Manji is physically, she cannot escape the biological entity of possessing the body of a woman. The author wonders whether these words, uttered in spite, are suggestive of the idea that the one who is born a woman, cannot escape the fate of becoming a woman; or are a challenge posed to all those who think that certain tasks can be managed by only men. Why should we have sayings which compare the woman, who acts ably, with men? Or why should certain acts in the first instance be taken as masculine? If this is with reference to gender, when it comes to caste, we have an insider Gundakka, a Brahmin herself, ridiculing Manji's desire to become a Brahmin with the observation that Brahmins are a flat community. In the next part, 'Ganda Ganda Bharayya Gindige Thuppa Tharayya', the focus of the story shifts from Manji to Baluvate Narayana and his wife Mankaliyamma. Mankaliyamma, a soft-spoken, well-brought up girl, fails to get respect in the households that she visits because of the worthlessness of her husband. The story refers to the 'othering' of wives by society. The story also briefly refers to the ease with which Mankaliyamma's parents dispose her of in the name of marriage even as they are particular about the girl who would come into their family as their son's wife. In addition, when the astrologer advises Mankaliyamma's mother to adorn Mankaliyamma with a finger ring and remove it immediately to ensure that the wealth of the family

remained with the family, the mother does so willingly, indicating that she is least bothered about the prosperity of her daughter. When Mankaliyamma is in a pathetic state, it is Manji who suggests that Mankaliyamma work for Lakshmi Devamma's household. It is Manji again who asks Mankaliyamma to work in her daughter's hotel. Ramadeva's strong opposition to the idea of a Brahmin working in the workplace of an outcast, Manji's daughter, shows how the caste system is more oppressive in the case of women. The high caste of the woman acts as fetters and prevents her from being financially independent. Interwoven with the narrative of class-conscious and caste-conscious society, there are references to Ramadeva's interest in Mankaliyamma who is a married woman. Although she is not happy in her marriage, she is stuck in it as Indian scriptures value and promote marriage. Even a simple desire for the husband to bring 'ghee' remains unfulfilled. The idea of useless husbands, who are not wicked, but are irresponsible and do not put in any effort to improve the lot of their wives and family, is a recurring motif in Vaidehi's stories. If Virginia Woolf talks about a room of one's own in the context of privacy and financial independence of women, Vaidehi speaks about a pair of sandals of one's own with reference to Vani Mai who yearns for a pair of footwear. Narasimha, a typical male chauvinist, is against the idea as he is of the opinion that these are all luxury items which should not be given to women. However, Doddappa is not of this view and hence gets sandals made for Vani Mai and other children of the family. Narasimha who can't digest the insult sets Vani Mai's right foot on fire. When Vani Mai is on her death bed, Vasanthi, the speaker, remembers the incident and has total disgust for Narasimha. Surprisingly, Vani Mai, nearing her last breath, asks for Narasimha and he wonders if it is a reconciliatory move. He is in for a shock when Vani Mai lifts her right leg and kicks him in the face making him bleed. Thus, Vani Mai is ready for a peaceful end after having avenged the wrong-doer. Vaidehi seems to suggest that

sometimes physical violence should be answered with physical assault. Men should not be allowed to establish their masculinity and virility by being violent with women. Another part of the story 'Padasale Mooleyallondu Katthale' depicts not so pleasant Gundakka, a child widow. Her nastiness in a way is the inevitable outcome of being a woman, shunned by all, ridiculed by all and made to feel like an unwanted door-mat whose only hope for redemption lies in death. It is natural that such women turn out to be self-centered with a tunnel vision. Referring to various rumours circulating around Gundakka, voiced by women themselves, the speaker wonders whether the origin of these rumours could be traced to men. The piece also refers to the devious ways used by Manji and Gouri, the two maids, who exhibit unusual camaraderie in fooling Gundakka. When Manji wants to use the well, but knows that Gundakka would resolutely occupy the place with sadistic pleasure, Gouri shouts a false alarm of snake and makes Gundakka flee the scene. But Narayana is cruder in making a snake out of a palm leaf and throwing it on Gundakka. This provokes the wrath of Ramadeva who orders Narayana out of the house. The part titled 'Oliya Havu' brings to light one more instance of humiliation that Mankaliyamma has to swallow because of her dishonourable husband. At such instances Mankaliyamma repents the fact that she is uneducated. Vaidehi suggests education as a remedy for the malady suffered by women who are made to believe that their husbands are the 'be all' and 'end all' of life.

'Ondu Kalla Vrithantha' juxtaposes honest Vachanna who remains poor because from his master Kamath he gets nothing more than verbal appreciation and Bacchamma, his wife, who pilfers because even her simple desire of eating good food is not satisfied. Even the humiliation of being caught red-handed with *sukrunde* and *vade* does not put an end to her stealing habit. But the incident has a powerful impact on the son Manjunatha who leaves the house in search of greener pastures and daughter Ambuja who ardently

hopes to get a job as soon as she finishes her education. The twist in the story comes when Manjunatha himself steals silver vessels from a wedding house which is caught in the confusion of torrential rains. Bacchamma sends him away to establish his own hotel unable to decide if his act is right or wrong. In the grim set-up Bacchamma's defence of her husband when the children speak against him is heart-warming. Bacchamma's generosity towards the Korathi is two-pronged. On the one hand, if the gesture can be viewed as a streak of kindness and generosity in Bacchamma despite her poverty-stricken existence, on the other, it can be considered an act ascertaining psychological satisfaction of being better than Gangamma, who in her superior position is miserly towards Bacchamma. The story clearly shows that if the haves like Kamath exhibit no sense of justice, the have nots will take law into their own hands. Bacchamma's appeal to her son to place his trust in Lord Ganesha seems to be the prayer of the writer herself to protect these small time thieves who steal, not because they choose to, but because they are compelled to by the circumstances.

It is worth noting that this aspect of economics and finance appears in works like *Meju Matthu Badagi.* 'Dose Rajakiya' - 'Politics of Dose' highlights Vaidehi's marvellous ability of using *dose*, pancake, as a signifier to various possibilities in the life of women. Interwoven with references to Machamma's special dosas and some widows' disappointment that life had denied them the pleasure of enjoying hot dosas are the lamentations of the women folk that no matter how hard they try, their dosas can never match the taste of the hotel dosas. Yet, the central concern of the piece remains with Vimalakka whose *raison de atre* seems to be preparing *Neer Dosas*. But the unexpected twist in the situation takes place when Vimalakka, who keeps complaining about the never-ending chore of grinding the batter and frying dosas, doesn't want to give it up because in a powerless world of hers the only moment of power she enjoys is as the

maker of tasty dosas, the culinary art in which she can be surpassed by none. The article concludes with a wry reference to Vimalakka's loaded smile when she observes that had she been born some years later, she could have made a fortune by establishing a hotel of Neer Dosas. Thus there is a reference to the lost chances in the life and world of women.

In addition to feminist and class consciousness, Vaidehi's **caste consciousness** can be studied by placing her as an insider in the upper-caste brahminical society who views its strengths and foibles not voyeuristically but with genuine concern. 'Bandu Hoguvavaru' has a rural setting and an admirable gamut of events, covering a wide range of characters realistically portrayed. Although the story delineates traditional equations between the higher and lower class, there are indications to show that these equations are changing. The totally positive and dignified character and caring attitude of Shanthamma shows that Vaidehi restrains from showing the upper class in a negative light as a populist move. If Sanni is meek and vulnerable, Chandu is brave and brusque. She is the only one who can laugh and cry at the same time. Dugga is no less brazen. But none is without positive streaks. Vaidehi's characterization is such that readers can retain their faith in the human species. The only male figure, Manja, remains in the periphery to be brought to centre-stage only when needed for specific purposes. By and large the world remains that of women, their multiplicity, their power or lack of it, their greatness and meanness. Vaidehi remains non-judgemental with her women characters as though her women proclaim to the world, "We are what we are."

It is also important to note that Vaidehi's concerns are not merely feminist. In many cases they are **humanist**. For example, the story 'Bussinolagondu Prajaprabhutva' is reflective of the happenings in the country. The writer draws a parallel between what happens in a nation and what takes place in a bus. The reluctance to fight for justice, fear

of involvement, shallow sympathy are all seen in the behaviour of the bus travellers. All are worried about their own skin. However, all of them are able to rise above the mundane when the initiative to right the wrong is taken by one of the passengers. Vaidehi seems to draw parallelism between Gandhi and the self appointed crusader of the bus, by picturing him as a frail, bald man. He could have been easily overcome by the conductor, but the conductor is intimidated by the earnestness shining in the eyes of the protestor. The bully, who had unlawfully taken a seat which was not his, is displaced and pushed to the rear end after the intervention by the bald man. The story is an optimistic message which states that democracy can be successful as long as people have the power of conviction to follow it and fight for it.

'Kola' voices the displeasure the female speaker feels against urbanisation. She yearns for the serenity and quietude of the time spent by the pond. She is all set to influence her husband to build such a pond in their rural property far from the maddening crowd when she comes to know that he has escaped getting hurt by the skin of his teeth. Immediately all her thoughts centre on him. The story is an acknowledgement of the value of human relationships and shows that all the other physical and topographical comforts are secondary to this.

'Sappala Madada Hejjegalu' shows the different stages in life slipping through our fingers without our realization. Different stages in life are personified through different characters and the narrator Rohini has the feeling that all around her have changed. Very shortly, standing in front of the mirror, she realises she too has changed and this rude realization comes to her only on looking at her own daughter. The sad part is that the change is not limited to the physical aspect alone. Narayana Master, a terror in his younger days, is meek and submissive in his spirit in his old age. Thus the passage of

time is shown as the subtle thief of life and hence the title – *Soft Steps That Make No Sound.*

'Aparichitha' depicts how people, who bond with each other at one point of time, can grow into strangers as their ideologies change. If the speaker is able to imagine that she is happy, Amith, in a way, imagines himself to be unhappy. His marriage to a Gujarathi girl of his choice is also to prove the point that he can defy people. The story is a plea to have a sincere approach to life.

'Olekarana Diary Inda' is a simple narration of a girl waiting zealously for a letter and the postman's emotional involvement with the girl. The initial sympathy of the postman for the girl turns into love for her and an urge to write a letter, if need be, to give her joy. Thus somewhere along the process is a change in the postman's feelings for the girl and there is a sudden hope of being her loved one. But the girl herself is totally oblivious of his feelings and her world centres around the letter she eternally waits for and finally receives. The postman is emotionally so drained out that he wants to resign from his post. But later on, in the light of the dawn, he decides to go ahead with life afresh. Perhaps the story tries to show the necessity to maintain distance between professional and personal life.

'Gulabi Mrudu Padagalu' highlights the intense desire of Saritha to see the little child whose soft, pink feet she has had the pleasure of glimpsing. Although she visualises every stage of development of the child and even gets to see the child being taken back, she never gets the chance to see the child. Neither does the story explain the reason behind Saritha's deep yearning to see the child. She is not able to even guess the sex of the child even though she gets to see the clothes hung outside. The reader is left to guess the reason for the poignant sorrow that Saritha feels every time she unsuccessfully

tries to glimpse the child. It is typical of Vaidehi to move the readers to intense feelings without neatly bundling them into set patterns. This story is a proof of the diverse themes handled by Vaidehi. The story highlights that all of us are essentially loners not because we are destined to be so but because we choose to be so. The protagonist Saritha has a huge boulder of grief waiting to melt through sharing, but she is unable to give it a chance. She declines the offer of a chat just as she had resisted the temptation of going in, to look at the baby whose pink feet she had glimpsed earlier. The story shows that we are imprisoned in our own apprehensions and only we can release ourselves from this bondage.

'Mara, Gida, Balli' is a pointer to the cyclic nature of things. In the rigmarole of human relations everyone is guilty of selfishness and this includes the narrator herself. Only after being incapacitated in her old age, she remembers her own attitude, in her younger days, towards her eighty year old mother. Even as she realises the hollowness of every relationship and the selfishness in every individual, given the choice, she would still choose to live the same life. This is indicative of the truth that most of us resign ourselves to the mundane aspect of life because we don't know what else to make of it. A revelation of what life is comes to all of us when nothing much of it is left. Vaidehi makes fun of hypocrisy at every point of her narration. If people like Mabala are going to establish closeness with the dying by boasting of being recognised by them, Sharada, the narrator, wants to finish with the task of feeding her mother even when her mother has no inclination to eat. She can thereby have the sense of satisfaction of having performed the duty of a daughter towards her mother. The doctor son, under the guise of pragmatism, shirks duty. In comparison, Shridhar and his wife, who fulfil their duty although reluctantly, seem to be nobler.

'Varthula', as the title indicates, is about the circular pattern in relationships. The speaker's mother-in-law, who is very particular that her daughter go into an independent household without the annoyance of a large family, expects the reverse for her daughter-in-law. However, it is worth noting that even while focusing on the cracks in familial relationships, Vaidehi almost always depicts the relationship between the husband and the wife as one of understanding.

'Padhaveedhara' is a typically didactic story of a rebel who has wasted himself in the notion of enjoying life. There is a turning point in his life when his wife shows respect for him as a learned man. This is a boost to the morale of the man who until then hadn't received a compliment to that effect. He sincerely tries to live upto the image of his wife although the letter he writes to her, full of errors, is a let-down. But the wife attributes the mistake to the pang of separation and the story ends with the man pining over the lost days and opportunities. Although the story has flashes of humour and philosophy, the 'preaching tone' in the ending is a disappointment. This is one of the few stories in the male voice, but is not as authentic as the other stories of Vaidehi.

'Sam-sara' is a sweet picturisation of a woman's restiveness on realising the dependence of too many people on her. However, a loving husband shows to her that there can be practical solutions to all problems and that he too needs her. He takes her out on a surprise visit to a resort to prove the latter.

'Bombeyata' proceeds on the expected lines of danger falling upon the commuters of a car which is driven by a cautious driver. The elders' earlier anxiety when the children were in the car of a supposedly rash young driver, gets mocked when tragedy befalls the car of the steady driver. Vaidehi's attempt, obviously, is to show that if human

being proposes, God disposes. The story has neither a deep philosophical insight nor the pleasure of the unexpected.

'Badukalonde Bhashe' shows how words are used as foil to cover grief. Shivu, who can bring a smile on the face of every one with whom he hobnobs, takes recourse to incessant speaking even when he comes to know of his son's polio attack. The story shows how people whom we may dismiss as 'noisy' and 'insensitive' are the most pleasant, straightforward and simple beings, loquacious although.

'Soothaka' has a meaningful analogy between the bottle of a child and Bhaskar, the friend of the narrator. Just as the child is grief-stricken over the broken bottle, the narrator is sorrowful at the death of his friend. If he consoles the child saying probably the bottle would be all right the next day, the child placates him saying possibly Bhaskar would return the next day. The story highlights the inevitability of death and the difference in its impact depending upon human relationships. If the speaker is almost casual at the news of the death of another youngster by the name Kittu, the speaker's mother and his friend have similar responses to the news of Bhaskar's death. Their sentiment is like that of the speaker earlier when he had felt that death was nothing to mourn about, as the living did not really achieve much. The story makes it clear that ultimately a loss is a real loss if the departed is dear and valuable to the living.

'Hagalu Geechida Nenta' is reminiscent of Beau Tibbs, an unwanted visitor who makes himself comfortable and even tries to extricate hospitality from the mistress of the house. His tragi-comic character turns out to be repulsive in the end with his references to the two girls opposite his house who solicit customers, either an old man like him or even girls. Even as the description of these girls and their desperation becomes unbearable for the speaker, the man, who so blithely refers to them, also becomes intolerable. Her

disgust is evident in her decision to wash the cover of the cushion on which the man had sat.

'Pathitharu' is one more story which lacks a definite story line. It revolves around two people's search for a house in a rural set-up. As usual they come across people who give vague instructions to reach the place. Even as they begin to despair, there is a girl who assures them proper directions and even offers to go with them. However, this part of the journey too proves to be tiring. Just before the final lap, the girl takes leave of them providing them with further directions to reach the house. In addition, she sows the seeds of suspicion by wondering if the host would be home or not! The story ends with this note of uncertainty. The strength of the story lies in Vaidehi's insight into human nature and her deft handling of an ordinary situation to reveal extraordinary truths about human beings. She is Frostian in her approach in such instances.

'Kaneyadavaru' has a sudden twist in the end. The story seems to revolve around a victimized wife, Kusum, whose husband disappears, on and off, according to his whims and fancies. Kusum calls her friend Latha on such occasions, but when Latha offers to visit her, declines the offer. Neither does she heed Latha's suggestion to approach the police or a doctor. She also cautions Latha not to mention the problem to her people. Only on one occasion, when a stranger visits Kusum, claiming to be her husband's friend, in her husband's absence, Kusum agrees to Latha's offer of a visit. But on reaching the place, Latha is shocked to find Kusum's husband home. She is further flabbergasted when she learns from the cook that neither had Kusum's husband had gone away nor had a stranger visited Kusum. Vaidehi leaves the readers to draw their own conclusions even as the clues point to the possibilities of Kusum being a schizophrenic, under spells of hallucinations. The fact that earlier she had confided in Latha that her husband had forced

her to go to a doctor when she wanted him to be examined as also the fact that the husband looked sleepless when Latha visited them, are the clues pointing at Kusum's mental illness. The husband, who apparently hadn't revealed the crack to the family members turns out to be a noble one. Thus, the story has the pleasure of the unexpected and leaves the readers with the game of conjecture.

The short story 'Sabitha' describes the protagonist Sabitha's impatience directed at her neighbour who seems to have everything in life. Sabitha herself is a working woman who has to struggle to make ends meet. Sabitha doesn't mince words while accusing the maker of being unfair. The narrator, who has gone to stay with Sabitha prior to a job interview, is informed by Sabitha that the neighbour's husband goes early in the morning and returns late in the night. Sabitha also adds grudgingly that the wife has absolutely no work to do as she has a maid. The house which is completely silent on other days seems to come to life only on Thursdays when there is a visitor with whom the woman is very friendly. But before Sabitha can gather more information, she is in for a shock as the rich woman commits suicide. Thus, the story is built on the oft-discussed idea that all that meets the eye is not true and that wealth is not everything in life. Although the storyline is not unusual, the characterization of Sabitha is powerful.

'Mathu Sotha Kshana' is about the condolence visit of an old man to the house of bereavement after the death of an old woman. The visit is a surprise to all as none had known that the old man had any intimate connection with the house. The old man himself, evidently melancholic, looks as if he wants to speak about something but returns without having uttered a single word. His relationship with the house remains a question mark although there are references to his having spent a lot of time as a youngster in the

house of grief. Again, in this story too, it is not so much the storyline but the realistic description of the house of death, tinged with sarcasm that makes the story appealing.

'Prashne' brings to the forefront the idea that not many among us have the courage to follow the prompting of our heart. Bhuvi, who has sent a cheeky question to a speaker after a talk, refuses to own up the question. But Anu, who had only passed on the question, later meets the speaker as Bhuvi lacks the courage to do so. Bhuvi, who is worried about the repercussions of the act of spending time with the speaker, has a sense of loss when she thinks of Anu in the company of the speaker.

'Avaravara Bhavakke' has the interesting plot of the place designated for God's photos and idols being adorned by different Gods as the people who take the house on rent keep changing. On one occasion, the spot is used to store bottles even. But when the story ends, the new couple, who have moved in, use the spot to make their little son sit quietly while the woman cooks. Savitha, the owner, is moved to tears looking at the child as the child reminds her of her own childlessness. Perhaps Vaidehi tries to point out the shallowness of barriers created in the name of religion and the strength of human relationships.

'Bedakata Badukella' is about a young bride, who is on her honey moon, meeting a young widow. The short story is perhaps one of the few stories of Vaidehi which lack maturity of language and reality of plot.

**Geriatrics** as a theme is handled with subtlety and sensitivity by Vaidehi. Both Shashi Deshpande and Vaidehi take up the problem of old age as a social problem. Perhaps humanity as a whole hasn't dealt with ageing and problems of ageing as earnestly as it ought to have. Every government should take up the cause of geriatrics with serious concern because it is as much a social problem as dowry, child labour,

prostitution etc. 'Summaniralagaddhu' has a double twist in the end when Narmada, the speaker realizes that her co-traveller in a train journey has murdered her own invalid mother, not being able to cope with the situation of having to shuttle between her helpless, bed-ridden mother's home and the unrelenting, uncompromising husband's home. The look of torment in the eyes of the woman is the outcome of having to bury the secret without the respite of confiding in someone. It is this agony that makes the woman confide in the speaker. Narmada, who is aghast on hearing the truth just before the woman alights from the train, is further shattered by the entry of a couple lovingly carrying their little one. Narmada screams at the horror of it all because the sight of the parents with the child is a reminder to her of what a child can turn out to be in the later stages of life. However, the woman who has murdered her mother is as much a victim as her mother was because she was caught in the predicament of having to bear with her unrelenting husband and her dependent mother. Although the woman tries to ease the situation by appointing a nurse to take care of her mother, the physical and mental trauma drives her to the extent of putting an end to her mother's life. Perhaps she does it to offer relief to her mother. But whatever might have prompted the act, the truth remains that for the rest of her life she will live like a hunted animal. The story, in addition to highlighting the problems of women who cannot dictate terms to but are dictated terms by their husbands, also bares open the problems of old age.

'Katthaleya Mathu' values people's ability to forget and forgive when placed behind the veil of darkness, with words acting as bridges covering the gaps in communication. The visitor in the story has a long-standing misunderstanding with the speaker even after the cause of the misunderstanding is long forgotten. However, his visit to see Ajjayya who is paralyzed acts as a healing factor and both the speaker and he are able to forget their animosity and converse in a friendly manner in the darkness of the

room even as they wait for power. The speaker feels levitated at the prospect of burying the hatchet and goes in to prepare coffee for the visitor. But just as she offers coffee, the power comes and she is face to face with her long-standing foe in the brightly lit room. Shockingly, the visitor leaves the place almost unceremoniously and the chance offered for a patch-up in the darkness of the room is lost forever. In this story, we see that darkness and brightness act as metaphors for man's instinct for revenge and forgiveness. Even as darkness aids man in the act of acceptance, brightness sharpens his ego. The story also highlights how words can be a double-edged weapon with the twin-ability to make or mar relationships. One of the concerns of Vaidehi is the power of words. She shows repeatedly that when words are uttered, they may end up being quite different from what they are intended to be. Very often people don't scheme to hurt others with their gibes, but end up doing so unbeknownst to themselves. The speaker's caution with words while speaking to the visitor is an example of the proverb 'once bitten twice shy'. Another oft-recurring theme of geriatrics too has its place in the short story. Whether it is genuine concern or not, in a large family the old and the invalid are often visited by the rest of the family and even if it were to be a customary gesture, it would make life more bearable for the old. The importance of family is thus highlighted by Vaidehi in the course of her narratives. One more point to be noticed is that it is always women and not men who take care of the old, whether grudgingly or lovingly. Although we don't get to understand the speaker's relationship with Ajjayya, we do get to witness Ajjayya's contemptuous references to Sadashiva not being with him when needed. Again, it is not clear who Sadashiva is. But it is clear that he is the man who should have looked after Ajjayya. However, from Ajjayya's remarks, we gather that it was the *hudugi*, the girl, who ran to him when he had the paralytic attack, and it was the same *hudugi* who sat by his bed side in the dark room treating him with her version of physiotherapy. Thus,

Vaidehi like Deshpande directly and indirectly refers to the nurturing ability of women repeatedly.

'Marevu' as indicated by the title is on the loss of memory in old age. However, the story moves beyond this mental condition to make philosophical observations. Through various instances Vaidehi shows how in two stages in life – childhood and old age - people live their lives without being aware of their sex and gendered identities. In childhood, if not for the difference in dressing, a male child can easily be mistaken for the female and vice-versa. In old age people reach such a stage that they are oblivious of their sex and are hardly aware of the opposite sex. Such a situation can bring together husband and wife as friends. Sometimes, such an asexual existence can be the outcome of the infirmity of old age. Some other time, a person, after being reprimanded for risqué act, might behave as if he were totally devoid of sexual existence. But the stage, which allows a person to be totally unaware of what sex she or he belongs to, is the phase of freedom when one can live purely as a human being – neither male nor female. Ajja who drapes a sari while serving his grand children and Ajji who has absentmindedly draped a sari over a shirt are symbolic of such a state.

A major concern of Vaidehi is the **repercussion of urbanization and modernization**. 'Namma Shanthiya Bayake' is a simple story of a girl fantasising about having a dozen children and ultimately settling for only two because of the trouble faced in rearing them up. The story shows the gap between romanticised ideas and reality. Perhaps the story intends to point out that nuclear families have made child-bearing and child-rearing increasingly tough for modern generations.

'Maneyavaregina Hadi' shows how the road approach to a house, a convenience all are happy about, has a negative side to it because the same road is used by Ramanna,

the son of the house, to take two bag full of areca nut in a lorry, to the displeasure of the inmates of the house. The road has caused even a huge jack fruit tree to be felled and Vasanthi, who is on a visit to the house, is filled with a sense of melancholy. The story seems to convey the idea that for every gain there is an equivalent loss. It could also be a subtle censuring of urbanization and globalization which make people more and more self-centred and corrupt.

This concern is reflected in her essays also. In her collection of essays *Meju Matthu Badagi* she has the piece 'Shravanada Angaladalli Bandilidavalu' which nostalgically refers to the bangle seller, who makes, sells and lovingly adorns the hand of every woman with individual care and concern. Her business acumen is astounding. She can converse, counsel, and calculate, all at the same time. Her concern for the mistress of the house whose hands are hard because of over work is as genuine as her affection for the child for whose hand she brings special bangles to ward off evil. Such a festive occasion is slowly displaced when the town gets a bangle shop by the name *Kangan.* Although the shop is of the son of the bangle seller, the commercial aspect is all too evident in the bargaining that goes on at the shop. The urbanization is further evinced in the names of the bangles which are of stars and movies. The piece ends with references to the speaker's melancholy on learning about the death of the bangle seller whom she considers an elderly friend. Thus the piece is reflective of the loss of personal touch in the modern world of commercialization.

In her autobiographical writing *Lekhakhiya Putagalu* Vaidehi voices the same concern. 'Kavalu Kadavaru' offers a graphic description of the preparation of 'Sendige', a kind of fryums, and laments the truth that such rustic practices have gone out of vogue as everything is available on payment. However, the fact remains that the cessation of

such activities denies people the opportunity of working and sharing their joys and sorrows in a group. The predicament of modern times is of alienation and this psychological phenomenon is interwoven with the life style and physical activities.

In continuation comes 'Ohoho Banni' revealing the joy of the host in receiving guests who have come unannounced and the insistence of the host that guests should continue their stay for a longer period. This warmth is a contrast to the globalised modern India in which Indian ethos is lost.

Vaidehi's versatility as a writer is seen in the stories such as 'Kali Purusha' and 'Putta Hakki Mathu Akasharaya' in which her oeuvre is **metaphoric**. Kalipurusha could be a metaphor for the stifled feeling or phobia which makes life unbearable until and unless we have the courage to bring it out in the open. The narrator is in fear of the detestable Kalipurusha who occupies a seat of prominence in her office and is respected by all. The narrator has no clue as to who the abominable character is. Neither her friend Seemitha nor her father helps her out. Both of them advise her not to ask questions and her discomfort keeps growing. This could be suggestive of the silence that is imposed on people. It is only when the speaker breaks her silence that she is free. 'Putta Hakki Mathu Akasharaya' lacks the authentic flavour that Vaidehi exhibits in the rest of her stories. Vaidehi tries symbolism in this story making it allegorical. The little bird's search for Akasharaya comes to an end on finding the Akasharaya, but it only leads to the realisation that the Akasharaya is interested in a shadow or another bird behind the little bird. Despite this realisation and in spite of the Kalajja urging it to be free of Akasharaya, the little bird takes refuge in the vast expanse of Akasharaya. This could be a reference to women's dependence on men even when advised to be independent.

'Gola' describes the attempts of a child to understand as to from where the sun comes and to where he goes. She cannot accept the idea that the sun can come and go without letting her know where he is going. She wants to witness the setting fully by climbing on to a tree and later a mountain. But she fails in her pursuit. Tired and drained out, when she wants to go back to her people, she realises that her return journey is fraught with danger. Perhaps Vaidehi wants to capture the idea that those with the spirit of adventurous often find themselves alone in their pursuit.

'Prashnotharagala Ache' brings to the forefront the existential absurdity which shows the speaker as being unsure of her destination. She seems to find some comfort in the grief of the girl who sits next to her in the bus. But if the girl grieves over her separation from her beloved, the speaker's angst is the outcome of her pointless existence. She doesn't seem to know where she is heading for. Nevertheless, there is a strong urge in the speaker to console the girl. There is also relief in witnessing the free display of sorrow on the part of the girl. May be the story tries to reiterate the Buddha's message that all of us grieve although the causes differ. If grief is inevitable, it is better to take comfort in the idea that suffering is universal and that you are not the only one to be deprived of pleasure. The relieving feature of the story lies also in the speaker's longing to strike a conversation with the girl and her urge to do something to alleviate the girl's pain. The story depicts how disturbing thoughts can haunt an individual and grip her, as a ghost would. The strength of the story lies in its original simile of comparing the ponderous movement of the stars in the sky to the night bus travellers. It is also refreshing in bringing to the forefront the rural beliefs in a light-hearted manner. Minka and her daughter Rukku believe that the peculiar 'tipi tipi' sound Rukku makes while walking is indicative of Rukku being a thief in the previous birth. Rukku accepts this and is not disturbed by this as the previous birth is a closed chapter for her. Caught in her

circle of fear, the speaker wonders at the Buddha's courage to have walked out on all relationships and contacts in the middle of the night. The speaker with all innocence and simplicity avers that she wouldn't have the courage to do it. Vaidehi charmingly presents the idea that with the great it is not the physical aspect but the metaphoric that is the actual test of strength. With the Buddha, it is not the courage of walking out in the middle of the night, but walking out on all that one would hold precious that is courageous.

'Tharangagalu' refers to the waves of thought and fancy set to motion by the sound of the bell. The tolls vary from the temple bell through the church gong and the bell of the groundnut seller to the school bell. The bell turns out be a different metaphor for different people. The bell, the speaker muses, could be the ensuing of dreams for the ground-nut seller. The bell for which all students eagerly wait turns out to be the bell that triggers off romance. Finally the door-bell symbolises all the expectations of the speaker who ardently waits for the 'he' in her life. Thus the bell becomes the universal symbol of expectation. If we go back to the idea of devotees tolling the bell in a temple, the message perhaps is that all of us pin our hopes and dreams on different pursuits, but the realisation of these is not in our hands. The ringing, a conscious act, can be equated with the human endeavour, but the outcome is to be divinely ordained. The reference to the possibility of the church gong being mistaken for the temple bell, when not heard distinctly, seems to suggest that despite human aspirations and activities being different, the difference is only superficial. The story which is devoid of a set plot can be noted for the interlinking of ideas and metaphors.

'Mustafa' is a kind of retold story of 'Ali Baba and Forty Thieves'. As averred by Vaidehi herself, it is inspired by a children's play *Ali Baba* by Ninasam. It looks as if Vaidehi dappled with the new narrative strategy of 'fantasy' in this short story.

'Payana' as signified by the caption depicts the end of life's journey. With resonances of Emily Dickenson's 'Because I Could Not Stop for Death...' the speaker joins a procession although she cannot understand if it is a wedding or funeral procession. The idea that the journey is pleasant is conveyed through the desire of the speaker to roam around in the wilderness. However, the direction is decided by the ones in charge of the *dibbana*, the groom's party, once again a positive word. The speaker who is devoid of autonomy is soon made to feel her bodylessness when she passes through a huge tree without having dashed against it. The people on the procession are fearful, but strangely they do not evoke fear in the mind of the speaker. In the final phase of the journey when it comes to crossing a river, the speaker is left alone. It is now that the speaker who is in the familiar surroundings of her home and in the presence of her parents notices her nonexistence for others. She also realises that none of the physical discomforts is felt by her. Vaidehi echoes Kuvempu's description of the bodylessness of the soul and its liberation from the physical confinement.

In 'Khali Gode' Vaidehi once again takes recourse to metaphoric writing. The wall, which is initially adorned by various items of different members of the family, is later left bereft as the family members decide to do so. However, the empty wall builds walls among family members and they drift apart until they start using the wall again. In fact, they are urged to do so by the words on the wall. The metaphor of wall acts at two levels. At one level, it is symbolic of differences co-existing. Different members of the family have different interests and they adorn the wall accordingly. But at this point there is no tension and diverse things co-exist. But the minute they decide that they would have the wall empty, they have silent but solid walls of hostility among themselves. The wall, in a way, becomes a symbol for coexistence as also a symbol for unity in diversity. The wall absorbs all; it has a place for all however different their tastes might be. But if this

coexistence is denied to it, the wall has no meaning, no relevance. The wall can be a metaphor for a family, a community, a society or a nation itself. Personal differences will always exist. It is not necessary to sacrifice individual preferences in the face of larger issues. However, it is absolutely necessary to bury personal differences and allow thoughts, ideas, concepts, practices and rituals different from our own to coexist. This is the essence of life and the essence of happiness.

'Avalinnu Barlilla' begins with references to a strange creature, which a little girl, referred to as *Thangi,* brings home. Although no one can make out which species the creature belongs to, the girl's happiness on possessing it knows no bounds. But one fine day it seems to grow wings and disappears. When it reappears on the sky, the girl goes in search of it. The story refers to this creature as the mind, the dream, the poetry, which is beyond classification and definition. By stating that *Thangi* who has gone in search of the creature hasn't returned yet, the piece seems to suggest that the world of creativity is vast and wide and not easily attainable.

Since the demarcation between creative writings and other articles no longer exists, Vaidehi's collection of articles in *Meju Matthu Badagi* and *Lekhakhiya Putagalu* have been brought under the scope of the research work. The latter is an autobiographical piece and as shown earlier, many characters that are covered in this narrative have place in the fictional world of Vaidehi. However, of non-fictional writings, the reason for dealing with these two books as the primary source is that the knowledge of the characters appearing in these works can enrich one's understanding of her stories. In fact, in the style of narration there seems to be hardly any difference in the case of Vaidehi as a story teller and Vaidehi as a philosopher, even as the genres seem to be different. The fictional and the real coalesce both in treatment and theme. Vaidehi admits, "Navu

bareyuvudara hecchu palu atma kathanave. Kathe kavana prabhandha nataka munthada halavu margagalalli idiyagi athava ede edegalalli adu hommuthale iruthade."[5] The gist of these words is Vaidehi's avowal that most of a writer's works are autobiographical in nature and the autobiographical element comes to the forefront in different genres of writing such as short story, poetry, essay, drama etc. In 'Entu Ghanteya Khinna Nenapu' Vaidehi refers to the idea of people from her life featuring as different characters in her fictional world. She refers to women who seemed to have gone mad, reminiscences of whom can be seen in the sketch of Akku in the short story by the same title. Except for a few instances when Vaidehi directly addresses the readers with personal references to her family and a few other cases wherein she mentions critical theories as the framework for some of her observations, her articles sound almost like her short stories. For example, the piece 'Accident' which does not appear in the anthology of short stories has all the aesthetic features of a short story. 'Accident' has elements of mystery because the onlookers are unable to understand the relationship between the boy who is hurt in an accident and the girl who is at the spot. Neither do they understand the connection between the girl and another boy who comes on a bike and takes the girl away. Vaidehi is not interested in solving the mystery of the accident victim being dead or alive. Her concern is to throw light on human frailties and weaknesses by bringing under her scanner the behaviour of the curious onlookers who have gathered at the spot. Even as they show concern for the girl, they don't hesitate to indulge in the character assassination of the girl. There is hardly any genuine willingness to help the accident victim. In this piece, Vaidehi passes wry comments on people and their warped interests.

While analyzing the trend of fictional with the non-fictional, it is hard to decide whether there ought to be a difference. However, it is easier to understand why the difference ceases to exist. Whether it is a short story or an article Vaidehi brings to life

men and women she has come across in real life situations and realistically approaches their apprehensions and aspirations. She herself refers to a few characters mentioned in her articles as having appeared in her novels or short stories although with different names. Finally, it is seen quite clearly that be it in creative works, be it in any other discourse her primary concerns remain with the marginalized section of society, both men and women who are victims of rigidly stratified rural India, discriminated against in the name of class, caste, and community. In the case of women, there is three-tiered marginalistion if they have the misfortune of belonging to the wrong class and caste along with the 'wrong' gender.

'Meju Kurchiya Moolaka' featuring in ***Meju Matthu Badagi***, which falls under the genre of *Lalitha Prabhasndha* makes direct references to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and sardonically points out that in the set up of rural India a woman cannot make a claim to even a table and a chair of her own leave alone a room! The table is denied to Malathiakka who herself is a professor although her husband in the same profession proudly possesses one. The irony reaches its peak when Vaidehi concedes that with changing times 'a table', if not a writing table at least a dressing table, is granted to a woman as her proud possession. Vaidehi perhaps suggests that a woman's importance is decided by her beauty and not her intellect. It is as if the dressing table is feminine and the writing table masculine. This trend of thought is further highlighted through the episode of an alliance for Ramananda's graduate daughter. The proposal does not come through because the foreign returned boy is shocked by the behaviour of the girl who shows audacity of sitting on the sofa in the drawing room when the boy comes to 'see' her. Vaidehi doesn't spare her respectable Ajjayya in the ridicule. Ajjayya, who had made all the women in the family feel that a table was as natural a possession for a man as his shaving set, doesn't mind a fashionable female client sitting in the chair in his office. His

hypocrisy is evident when he argues that the woman is educated and hence deserves to sit on the chair. Ajji cannot digest this double standard from the man who is against the idea of girls being educated beyond eighth standard.

Surprisingly the title article 'Meju Mathu Badagi' is free of feminist concerns. The protagonist seems to be the absent figure of the carpenter whose earnestness has resulted in making an apparently plain table, a highly adaptable one. It seems to be customized to whatever use it is put to and it rises to the occasion when it has to offer solace to a mournful soul who puts her head on the table and weeps. While attributing human and humane qualities to an inanimate object, Vaidehi's purpose seems to be to highlight the integrity of the carpenter who with his honest work had gifted the household with a long-standing friend.

In 'Kannu Kanada Rasthe' Vaidehi refers to the conversation between fish mongers and an upper caste woman in the evenings as "Minu Peteya Ramayana" which means "long stories of fish market". When Vaidehi adds that these "Ramayana and Mahabharatha" never saw the light of the day, although there is a possibility of her referring to the thwarted literary possibilities and creative genius of rural folks, it is more likely that she refers to the unacknowledged and unpublished tales of woe, adventure, and struggle of these women. Perhaps their lot is to be as silent as the fish that don't whimper while getting baited. The title refers to the stigmatized road of prostitutes and drunkards. The charm of the piece lies in the vibrant picturisation of the fish mongers whose walk is closer to a run, the realistic description of the prostitute Gulabi who seems to have a great divide between the fully made up face and the dark neck and the unexpected revelation that even as Gulabi's red lips flash a smile, the rest of the face remains devoid of mirth.

In 'Masada Chithra', Vaidehi sketches the character of Kashi Mavayya with his strengths, weaknesses and idiosyncrasies. Similar is 'Mavayya Bandharu' from *Lekhakiy Putagalu* though the latter is purely positive explicating the simple pleasures an avuncular figure brings into life with small gifts like chocolates and petty cash.

In 'Mayavayithu Akasha', Vaidehi attempts symbolism again. The narrator initially laments that the sky has disappeared as the plots adjacent to her house are filled with houses. However, she realizes in the end that her home too has devoured the sky. She is caught in a paradox. On the one hand, she knows that the sky is infinite. On the other, she is aware that it has been taken bit by bit by humans, including her. She fervently hopes that the sky once again enjoys its entirety. The references evidently point out man's greed which has taken the whole of the earth and is likely to take the whole of the sky too. Continuing with symbolism, in 'Male Mathu', Vaidehi takes Maleraya as a metaphor for irresistible male attraction and invincible male powers.

The piece 'Abbha Besige', while graphically presenting the extreme heat of summer, also acknowledges the fact that the season is the beehive of all activities. The write up also makes references to the freedom men have in being scantily clad in such times as against women who have to be properly clothed irrespective of weather conditions. When a woman refers to this and the other women cackle, even that is objected to by men, as laughing loudly is not considered lady-like and is taken as the characteristic of a harlot. Vaidehi, as usual, describes with incomparable clarity the agrarian activities of doing up the courtyard with cow dung, raising bunting etc. The write up ends with references to changed times and changed activities even as summer remains as unbearable as ever.

In 'Kannadithiya Athanka', Vaidehi voices her concern about Kannada as a language of communication and also expresses her love for the Kundapura dialect of Kannada. Her special affinity for Kundapura Kannada also makes her wonder how she could have compromised at the higher level in sending her children to English medium schools. While conceding the importance of English as the global language, she does admit that if our children are made to hum Kannada songs instead of English rhymes, however beautiful the latter might be, they would vocalize in their own language instead of a borrowed one. 'Kannadada Thapathraya' from *Lekhakhiya Putagalu* takes up the issue of not only vernacular language but also the dialects of that. If English seems to threaten the vernacular, the vernacular in turn threatens the regional dialects. In such a situation, the question of saving and preserving our language acquires a multi-layered existence.

In 'Saguthide Doni, Saghuvaruvanthide' Vaidehi exploits an ordinary situation of waiting for a boat to take a peep into human weakness of coming up with definite answers even when one is unsure of the answer simply because one doesn't want to admit that one doesn't know! However, the central concern of the piece is life and the boat is a metaphor for the journey which seems to be full of uncertainties.

'Payanadallina Hudugi' revolves around a small girl following a man probably not knowing where she is going or why she is being taken. The speaker, who is reminded of her own children in their tender age, feels sorry for the child but is helpless to do anything for her.

'Avashesha' revolves around an old woman's obsession for a flowering plant and her staunch refusal to cut it even when it obstructs the entrance of the house that she has rented out to a young couple. Savi, the young, expecting girl, understands the pain of the

old woman through her incoherent blabbering when the old woman has a fever. The girl grows compassionate towards the old woman and the old woman is able to cure herself of the obsession and cuts the flowering plant as if she had severed ties with unpleasant memories through this act. The piece brings to centre-stage human relations in general and the bonding between women.

'Agochararu' is a fine representation of women like Venkathe who weave around themselves a web of human relationships with the fond idea that they themselves are importantly placed in it. Although the truth is far from it, perhaps such an approach makes life more bearable for them.

The overall feeling the portrayals of Vaidehi leave you with is the wonderment at Vaidehi's extra-ordinary insight into ordinary situations. Every aspect of life is keenly observed with gentleness and understanding. It is vividly shown that even things which seem unimportant have their own significance and it is our attempts to place them in a proper perspective that will add quality to life. When it comes to the world of women, her writings espostulate the idea that men often hurt without knowing it and that is why women writers are much more sensitive than their male counter parts while dealing with gynocentric issues.

In the autobiographical piece ***Lekhakhiya Putagalu***, Vaidehi begins her narrative by throwing light on her large family, which in spite of not being a joint family, had always been brimming with people because of the Indian virtue of hospitality. She attributes her world-view to these roots of the past wherein a large family was like a small, but complete world. Vaidehi also tries to trace the various influences on her literary career to her childhood experiences. Considering how alienated women of her household were from men, she wonders how women didn't end up hating men. Perhaps

this was possible because of the unquestioning attitude of women. The same unquestioning attitude prevented them from questioning the practice which disallowed girl children from sitting on the chair at the table for study. Vaidehi reveals that the practice was broken in the case of her elder sister who was exceptionally brilliant. If going out alone was a taboo for women, the practice of being accompanied by a male, even if the male happened to be a servant was a prestige issue. This reference clearly brings to one's mind the idea of subjugating women in the name of protection. 'Madiyalli Madi' traces the changes in customs and traditions and refers to the less restricted existence of the modern age without the impositions of menstrual cycle confinement period on women.

In 'Hetthavara Pada Nenedu' Vaidehi claims that if her writing has 'moderation' - neither extreme sentimentality nor clichés - it is owing to her mother's insistence on temperance in all that one did. She also takes up the spirit of accommodation of women by citing the example of her mother who learnt a new dialect of Kannada of her husband without fanatically sticking to her own. Notwithstanding this, she never gave up her own and used it with her people. The outcome is that the children were exposed to both dialects and enjoyed the nuances of both. This explains Vaidehi's smooth transition from one dialect to another in her writing. Vaidehi takes the question to the deeper frame of language fanaticism and gently rebukes those who do not have the openness to respect the language of the place they happen to live in. She argues that if one can be accommodative in spirit and respect the language of the place where one happens to be, it is a sign of respect for the people of that place as well as self respect. Learning another language without giving up your own is the fine-balance one should achieve. Thus in her references to her parents Vaidehi takes up feministic and political concerns without making the statements too loud or bold.

'Eshtu Pavanu Chinna', as the caption indicates, decries the idea of measuring the worth of a girl through the gold she carries with her. However, it has an element of surprise in the revelation that the idea of giving your daughter in marriage to a highly qualified boy without taking into consideration the disparity in life styles might be tragic. In support of this view, Vaidehi cites the example of the rich daughter of a hotelier from Bangalore, being given in marriage to a double graduate from a rural set up to which the girl could never adjust. Vaidehi considers the step erroneous as it took the smile away from the face of the young girl. The short piece indirectly states that rich or poor, the decision of marriage for girls is often taken by others.

'Aho Yaradhalli' graphically describes the rustic ritual of getting the courtyard done with cow dung. Vaidehi's acknowledgement that Seethu of her childhood days features as Manji in her short story 'Allallina Lokadavaru' explains the autobiographical element in her stories. It is not so much the plot as the characters that are autobiographical. The memory of these women of the lower class makes the writer melancholic.

'Bhajaneyo Kavya Ghoshtiyo?' refrains from mocking at the custom of singing devotional songs while pointing out that they are sung mechanically, as a daily routine. The custom which would be viewed as farcical by a cynic is supported by Vaidehi for its ability to create an aura. She has, as she herself avers, referred to this practice in 'Yavudu Kavya Jagake'. Even when the *Bhajane* turns out to be a community singing, marked more by prowess than promise, it can have a subliminal effect.

'Haduva Kavyada Doni Payana' refers to the advent of modernism in Kannada literature which released poetry from the rigidity of rhymes and high flown words. Vaidehi light heartedly refers to her amazement as a child over a word from the culinary

jargon – *Honna Gindi* - being used by Kuvempu in his lyric 'Dhoni Sagali, Munde Hogali'. Vaidehi has the same astonishment over the word-structure of earlier songs too for she is of the opinion that word-structure is primary to a song in evoking feelings and the technicality of the 'Raga' is of secondary importance.

'Bhadranemba Hiriya' is yet another reference to childhood memories. The death of the news of an elder in the family seems to sever a nerve of childhood associations. 'Bidhiyabbe Muduki' begins with references to an old woman selling borums. It moves on to the description of the school life. The piece once again brings to our mind the virtue of being economical. Vaidehi points out that in those days there was no concept of giving pocket money to children, and it was not possible either.

'Vachanna Mavayanna Mantapa' encapsulates the pain that goes hand in hand with the pleasure of wedding ceremonies. The pain is that the girl who gets married has to sever ties with the maternal home and the diverse associations that go with it. Vaidehi compares the experience to the second severance of the umbilical cord and confesses that the experience is even more painful than that experienced in childhood. Interestingly in all her childhood memories the men and women of the periphery - of the servant class - are brought to the centre stage. They are viewed with affection and their contribution towards the smooth movement of the wheels of life is gratefully acknowledged.

'Prarthamika Gurukulake Vandisi', as the title suggests, is Vaidehi's tribute to the school in which she studied. Vaidehi marvels at Raghumurthiraya, a teacher, who composed a prayer song in those times, earnestly praying for Hindu-Muslim unity. She has fond recollections of other teachers as well although the news about one or two of them meeting their end in poverty or having turned into alcoholics is disturbing for her. She has indelible memories of Govinda Master who seems to be the inspiration behind

her plays for children. Interwoven with the recollections are the economic situation of the children of large families who have only old books handed down to them unlike Suguna, the only child, whose books are always fresh. Although there is a yearning to be the only child enjoying all luxuries, Vaidehi's hastens to add that there is an inexplicable joy in reserving the books of the seniors too. Vaidehi seems to support the eco-friendly method of reusing the old books of the seniors. 'Nene Mahanubhavarannu' is an inventory of teachers all named lovingly, one by one. It is a little surprising that all come out as admirable. The question that crops up is, "Are there no negative associations or does Vaidehi choose to write on only positive references?" 'Sevanthigeya Kadalu' captures the excitement of students and parents about the school day. The present day scenario wherein parents are compelled and students are threatened to attend school days shows how urbanization has caught everyone in the wheels of speed and how in various ways the quality of life has suffered. 'Medalo Madalo' further explicates the personal touch given to prize winners. There were no short cut methods and if a student won four prizes, he or she ascended the stage four times accompanied by the words of encouragement and appreciation of all gathered. The prizes were not bracketed and given in one slot. The contrast in the present practice highlights the busy pace of life of the modern times which takes away from individuals such moments of simple pleasure.

'Elli Hode Jasmine?' refers to the untimely death of an old friend – a bundle of laughter – and the piece philosophically states that every moment of life should be lived as if it were the only truth and that in itself is the true essence of life.

'Kannethi Nodadhavaru' refers to the restrictions imposed on girl students. However, it was farcical that while the common norm for girls was not to speak to boys, there was no dearth of romances. Moreover, there were even scandals of unmarried girls

getting pregnant. Ironically such incidents further increased the restrictions imposed on girls. The piece satirizes the situation that equates the freedom of girls with their morality.

'Halina Pudiya Sambrama' shows how people get acclimatized to all that they would have initially resisted. It shows that with everything new it is the question of getting used to the newness and developing a taste for all that is unusual. 'Nintha Kala Nadeya Thodagithu' offers one more example of changing times by explaining how the trend of motor cars waiting for people changed to people waiting for public transport. It shows how society has changed from the individual to the collective.

'Nale Nodi' is yet another pointer to the modernization of villages. Here, the way in which modernization touches different aspects is highlighted by the various uses the damar and the container are put to. People, who had earlier not even known about the existence of a thing as 'damar', start using it in diverse ways. Vaidehi's power of imagination and description can be seen in her reference to asphalting as an old town draped in a new sari. 'Gundi Othidhare Sai, Light' clarifies that benefits of modernization such as electricity cannot be belittled. However, the old things thus replaced leave one with a sense of irreparable loss and melancholy.

'Ladyya Agamana' refers to the advent of the Radio. Radio is called Lady by Mandu who can't pronounce 'radio' and Vaidehi too takes off from there. 'Mari Kavi Bandiddhale, Kaniro...' refers to Vaidehi's poem chosen to be aired on the radio and the pleasure of listening to it in the neighbour's house. It also refers to people's addiction to radio and the aggression of youngsters in changing stations repeatedly. The reference is true of Television and its channels of the present times. The piece also reveals how women never exercised their choice over the radio and used it only in the absence of

men. Although the observation is casually made, it is so true of every medium of communication. Be it the newspaper, the television, or the computer, the prerogative of using it first seems to be of the male. To some extent it can explain the ill-informed existence of quite a few women. If they have no autonomy over the use of the multi-media, naturally the extent of awareness also remains limited. 'Mooka Ikho' places on record the contribution of Mangalore AIR in reaching to people, the literature in local dialects. Vaidehi considers radio a close friend, pervading one's life, yet not intrusive as it can be switched off when unwanted.

'Nenapina Hanathe' refers to the lamps of Diwali and the tradition of filling the cauldron with water to have oil bath before the sun rise. 'Av Misthramanna' refers to servants like Anthu who come to other houses for Diwali leaving behind their own children in order to earn a small amount. 'Govina Koralige Hara Hakuvavararu?' light heartedly refers to the confusion of the cattle which are bewildered by the attention they get on the days of feasts. Vaidehi wonders how to make the cattle understand that they are being worshipped. 'Ammana Gopuje' graphically describes the devotion of Vaidehi's mother. Vaidehi's regrets the fact that she never made it a point to learn the devotional songs her mother sang sonorously. Coupled with that regret is also a sense of loss over not having either a cow shed or cows to be worshipped on "Gopuje" day. She wryly adds that in the present times we have to wait for the cattle that may happen to pass by our house. 'Shubha Nudiyo Divalige' immortalizes the festival of lights as the one that has not lost its charm although traditional practices have all been replaced. 'Thulasige Namisi' resumes the narrative on interesting customs of marrying off Tulasi to Nellikai plant and offering *arghya* to Govinda.

In 'Apoorva Jodige Kai Mugidu', by referring to an ideal couple as the one wherein the husband shared everything with his wife and the wife offered him an enthusiastic listening, Vaidehi reformulates her ideas of a happy marriage. She points at the necessity for the husband and the wife to complement each other intellectually for a successful marriage.

'Yaru? Gandasaranthe Naguvudu?' picturises a woman, who defies all traditional norms associated with women, yet earns the admiration of both men and women, though women in secret have snide remarks to make. Vaidehi directs subtle sarcasm towards men who impose restrictions on 'their' women and are happy in the company of other women who show freedom of spirit. The title satirizes the idea that even in laughter women are expected to be moderate and if they exceed the limit they would be considered masculine.

In 'Adhunikatheya Punya Phala' Vaidehi expresses without a tinge of doubt that modernization, in the case of women, has been progressive. She refers to women of artisan's community, living next door, in a respectable manner. Their straight forwardness in referring to the philandering ways of men in earlier times in keeping women of their community as concubine and their spirit of resistance and resilience in finding new ways for their life, earn the appreciation of Vaidehi.

'Rama Rama' summarizes the childhood influences of mythologies and Dohas brought to a child's consciousness through Yakshagana prasangas, silent movies and later the cinema. The literary ambience in which Vaidehi, the then Janaki, was placed is forcefully felt in her references to the renowned writers with whom she hobnobbed. Her literary impetus and impulse can hence be traced back to these days. Although Vaidehi herself concedes that her first writing, a short story by the name 'Roopala Maduve' was

imitative in nature, it was her launching pad to the world of literature because from the home front the budding writers brought out a collection of writings called *The Flame of Literature*, for which their father wrote the prologue.

In 'Sumurthe Savadhana Ecchara' Vaidehi, while openly admitting that motherhood is the most joyous aspect of her life, also says in as many words that marriage took her unawares. By linking the experiences of marriage with the urge to write Vaidehi subtly points out that for woman loneliness or a sense of loss is inevitable even in a 'happy' marriage. In 'Andhariku Vandhanamu' Vaidehi concedes that her husband and father-in-law offered her all love and support. She rightly points out the importance of encouragement from her husband for her literary output by avowing that only those who have gone through the same experience or only those who have been denied encouragement would know the difference such an encouragement makes in the career of a woman writer. This admission clearly places before us the predicament of a woman-writer after marriage. While crediting Ninasam Troupe for creating in her an urge to read more and more literary stuff, Vaidehi also salutes Lankesh for the fillip given and Anupama Niranjana for her words of felicitation. Yet, the final word of Vaidehi on her literary output is a tribute paid to her mother who installed in her the sense of *hada,* 'balance' in writing.

Her latest work *Jathre* falls under the genre of novella and as the blurb says it is inclusive of different genres as short story, fiction, drama, essay, and poetry and hence defies categorization. At the superficial level it reads as a light piece laced by enthusiasm, excitement, humour and innocence. But at the deeper level one can glimpse intellectualism, apprehension, caste/class politics, and authentic portrayals of women. Every experience is a moment celebrating humanism and the world is viewed through the

prism of the temple fair. Even as the wheels of life rotate, the past, present and future merge into a seamless entity.

In conclusion what can be said about Vaidehi is that in the rubric of her writing on women, different streams of feminism are assimilated. Sociofeminists are interested in the roles assigned to women in our society and study the ways in which images are imposed on women. Sociofeminism dealing with the idea of false representations of women which expect them to accept specific social roles without the question of choice finds its voice in Vaidehi's characters like Sougandhi of 'Sougandhiya Swagathagalu', Varija of 'Samaja Shastrajneya Tippani', Yashoda of 'Chippu' and a host of other characters. Semiofeminists deal with the science of signs and study the signifying practices by means of which females are coded and classified as women in order to be assigned their social roles. It is here that we have to consider the invisible forces in society operating through ideological apparatus. This brings us to the question of myths and their influence on the collective psyche of a society. That is why, in addition to the debunking of popularly held notions about women, Vaidehi also deconstructs myths of ancient India which have typecast women. If the deconstructed myth of Shakunthala is the most significant of such works, other pieces which refer either to the practice of 'saligrama' being allowed to be touched only by men or men being allowed to be polygamous because of mythological sanction are equally thought provoking. Psychofeminism too is not an accidental feature in the writings of Vaidehi. Psychofeminism argues that feminine sexuality is constrained by male norms and categories. Literary texts that deal with the suppression of feminine desire and question such repression can be considered to be having psychofeminist agenda. Chandale in the short story by the same title and Achala of 'Antharangada Putagalu are two of the many, sometimes bold, sometimes subtle references to female sexuality. Marxist Feminism is a

form of feminism which believes that women's oppression is a symptom of a more fundamental form of oppression. Marxist Feminism postulates that women are not oppressed by men or by sexism, but by capitalism itself. If all women are to be liberated, capitalism must be replaced with socialism. In capitalist societies, women become segregated into the domestic sphere and men into the outer world of paid work. Economic and social inequality between the sexes is increased and women's' subordination in marriage, the family and in society in general is intensified. Marxists feminists' explanations also build on the thesis that women's subordination is the result of their lack of access to the productive sphere. These theories necessarily assume that across time and space, women have always been subordinated to men. Characters llike Babuli, Siri, Ammacchi evoke the pathos of the readers showing very clearly that the question of discrimination is not merely the question of equality, but the very question of social justice. Most of Vaidehi's stories revolve around the silent struggle of the poor for their very survival. It is in these stories that her socialist concerns come to the forefront. If even superhuman efforts fail to act as a lever to uplift the poor from their doomed existence, doesn't it become the collective responsibility of society and the government to treat the problem of the poor as a social problem? Thus, without indulging in the melodramatic presentation of extreme tragic situations, but by merely chronicling the daily struggle of the poor Vaidehi points out how unfair our social system is. And this is where she triumphs as a humanist.

In conclusion, about the short stories of Vaidehi, we can easily claim that amidst diverse themes, what emerges as the recurrent motif is the awareness of genderrd status and subaltern position of women. However, whether creative or autobiographical, what stands out as significant in the works of Vaidehi is her penchant for showing life as worth living, despite its multi-layered problems.

# NOTES

[1] T.B. Bottomore, *Sociology: A Guide to Problems and Literature,* 2nd ed. (Bombay: Blackie & Son (India) Ltd., 1986.)

[2] Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable.* 2nd ed. (Mysore: Geetha Book House, 1978) 7-8. (All further references are to this edition and are incorporated in the body of the text itself.)

[3]Ram Ahuja, *Indian Caste System,* 2nd edn. (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2007.)

[4] P. Lankesh "Ikeya Kriayasheela Lekhani." *Sahithi Sahithya Vimarshe.* (Bangalore: Lankesh Prakashana. 2008) 175.

[5] Vaidehi, "Pratikriye" (2007)

# CHAPTER VI

## Conclusion

Researching the works of women writers with feminist concerns should stand its grounds against the criticism that it would be far more profitable to actively involve in the real life problems of women instead of intellectually analyzing the literary output of women writers who only foreground such problems. However, ideologies, systems of assumptions, by which any society operates can be understood, opposed and reformulated when either critical theories of feminism or creative works with feminist concerns are read and appreciated. This role of the researcher can be understood in the light of the arguments presented by Deshpande in 'Writing Activism'. What Deshpande has to say about the complex relationship between the writer and the work is relevant in terms of the researcher and the research topic. Just as the question, 'Why do I write?' is perturbing to a writer, the question, 'Why do I choose to work on certain writers?' is disturbing to the research scholar. The light Deshpande throws on the process of writing, in a way, provides answer to the question, "Why do scholars research certain works?"

Commenting on the special place of prominence that a writer enjoys in society, Shashi Deshpande remarks that in India a writer's image is that of a rishi-guru because of the interconnectedness between literature and religion from ancient times. This troubles her. There is a sense of guilt, which brings up the question, "Why am I so privileged? What do I do that makes me deserving of such a privilege?"[1] She is also uneasy about the notion of usefulness of a writer and admits that the answer that writing is for pleasure or intellectual gratification would sound puerile if it is the time when the country is caught in a crisis situation and the writer can offer nothing to ease the situation. In such a set-up

the privilege enjoyed by the writer also seems to be unwarranted. A kind of defence is offered in the claim of social consciousness of a writer. But a writer herself never explains her creative impulse in such terms of social commitment, as a writer writes primarily for herself and cannot sacrifice the artistic finesse to the political or social cause. Deshpande does concede that at a higher level there are possibilities of a writer rebelling against the injustice in society and thereby reforming it. But this, according to her, is incidental and not premeditated and hence doesn't answer the question, "Why do writers write?" Explaining her own foray into creative writing, Deshpande avers that she started writing because of some vague sense of confusion and anger about the world not being right. It was only at a later stage that she was able to realize that the uneasiness was about the world of women not being right. It was the result of the sense of denigration she was made to feel about being a female. This angst of Deshpande is reminiscent of Vaidehi's similar confession in 'Gup Chip English'[2]. 'Gup Chip English' reveals the discriminatory attitude in bringing up male and female children even when parents are equally affectionate towards them all. Marriage in the case of girls and higher education in the case of boys are taken as the natural goals in life. However, the literary urge is spontaneous and despite the disparity in educational levels, girls give vent to their feelings in the form of literature. It is this very discriminatory attitude that turns many a female into a writer for it is in times of sorrow, anger and frustration that one is compelled to write, as these private moments cannot be shared with anyone.

These references underscore the commonality of the concerns that women writers face, irrespective of the differences in their particular circumstances, individual lives and differing languages. For writers in general, the beginning stage is a mystery because they often wonder what propelled them into writing. As they proceed, they realize that writing is not the outcome of knowledge, but is, in fact, a process of discoveries and they write

because they are in love with words. Deshpande espouses the theory that it would be wrong to assume that even when writing is the outcome of some troubled experience, the motive of the writer is to give a message. Thus Deshpande is unequivocal in stating that creative writing is not initiated by the urge for political and social reform. For Deshpande, the idea that every piece of writing should have social relevance is to belittle the concept of art for art's sake. However, the question of social relevance is not completely redundant and it is more complex than what it seems to be. Even as writers, who are concerned with what society does to an individual, present their individual response to society, in the process of writing, characters overtake writers and it is the views of the characters that get voiced. As the characters take over the story, bringing in complexities which have no place in an ideology-driven narrative, social issues are brought into the canvas through human lives. When the reader becomes a part of the agenda, she finds in the writer social relevance although the writer, on her part, is only communing with herself, trying to make sense of life. However, Deshpande agrees that writers should use their social position to bring about a change in society. But the truth remains that a single voice is hardly heard and that collectively something can be changed. The writers in India haven't come together collectively as a community of writers and hence have not made an impact socially. What a writer actually does is giving voice to the voiceless for she is endowed with imagination and can look at the world from a vantage point. This imagination endows a writer with the ability to offer glimpses into, though not answers to, the question, "How do we live?"

In the idea of collectively impacting society, Deshpande's sentiments are akin to those of Vaidehi. Vaidehi has voiced the need for people from the intellectual and creative circles to raise their voice against social injustice and fight inequality. She is disconcerted by the sordid truth that in reality, writers who are taken as powerful agents

of social change are far removed from this desirable role. She is of the opinion that in a world that is inhabited by a large majority that weighs everything in terms of profit and loss, the urge to oppose injustice is foundering.[3]

Hence it is important that at least those who have gained visibility by winning awards in the literary circles should use their voice to challenge the existing praxes. Thus it is clear that writers cannot de-link themselves completely from the question of social relevance and social commitment. And hence, on the one hand, through their writings if they could disseminate progressive ideas, on the other, they should use their position of authority in opposing retrograde forces of society. They cannot remain in their ivory tower isolated from the social tides.

The same is true in the field of research too and claims of personal fulfilment and social commitment would be half truths. Primarily, just as writers write because of their love for words, the research scholars choose writers because of their love for their works. But as the researchers use those works as their sites for debate, they are troubled by a sense of inadequacy wondering who would listen to them. However, they do hope that when they come up with a finding and when readers identify with it, the outcome of the research becomes universal, answering a human need. This ultimately takes the academic community one step closer to the cardinal question, "How do we live?" In this paradigm, the question why does one read a work is more important than why an author has written the work. We can liberate the authors and instead of asking why they have written what they have written, we can ponder over what there is in their works for readers.

This insight has led to the critique of the creative works of Shashi Deshpande and Vaidehi with a special focus on how they have re-written myths. The introduction attempts to put the research work in the perspective of feminism while pointing out the

similarities and differences in the feminisms of the world. While tracing the evolution and growth of feminism globally, the research work also outlines the adaptations and changes in the feminist stance and the feminist agenda over the years. It is argued that even after the coming into being of the term 'post-feminism', the struggle of women for attitudinal changes continues, signifying the need for feminist writers, feminist studies and feminist scholars. It is pointed out that despite healthy changes in the public spheres of education and employment, the private worlds of women have continued to impose stifling conditions that subjugate women. Since this subjugation is often in the name of sublimation and protection, women themselves are not aware of being denied equality in terms of decision-making and autonomy. It is shown that the imposition of being the cultural ambassadors of India, which was the most striking subjugating condition in the pre-Independence era, continues to raise its hydra-headed presence in the post-Independence era too. That is why under the Perspective the thesis includes the study of the impact of myths on the 'collective unconscious' of society. The two-pronged approach to myths views myths primarily as erroneous ideas impacting the collective unconscious of society and secondarily as mythological stories forming the basis of the constructed ideas. Thus it is posited that if mythological stories are the structure, the false images are the superstructure and the deconstruction of the imposed images is not easy as the base constitutes what has been held sacred by the large majority, for centuries. In this framework, creative writers who have the courage to debunk unhealthy implications of myths through their writing gain immense importance. That is why the research places Deshpande and Vaidehi in the perspective of feminism and archetypal criticism, which is the study of myths. This arm of the study has also involved a synoptic survey of women's writing in India from the Buddhist Period to the present. While accepting that women's writing might be different from that of men, it is argued that the difference is not of

quality. While admitting that the bulk of women's writing is lighter, it is pointed out that the societal norms prevalent through different stages of women's existence have curtailed their creative spirit. It is shown that even in the instances of women's writing being inferior to that of men, the cause is the denial of education and exposure to the world, the natural corollary of which is the narrow world view. More importantly, it is posited that the term 'domestic ideology' used contemptuously with reference to women's writing belittles the importance of the private worlds of women, overlooking the truth that the private is as important as the political. The dismissal of women's experiences as 'family ideology' and 'othering' or objectification of their positions as subjects are challenged.

The research work has been backed by literature review under the title, 'Works Problematised'. The review of literature has served twin-purposes: At the basic level, the review enhances the researcher's understanding of the writers; at the higher level, it enables the researcher to look into those facets of the writers' works, which have hitherto not been given enough importance. The review has served its purpose in establishing the fact that despite the considerable amount of critical work that has already gone into the interpretation of the various works of the writers, not enough attention has been paid to their bold re-reading and re-writing of many a myth that has debilitating influence over the well-being of women. It is also seen that while critiquing the writers' feminist stance, the critical debates sometimes, though not always, have failed to view the process as cultural criticism placed in the anthropological framework. When viewed in this praxis the writers emerge as humanists, concerned about the welfare and progress of the human race.

In the third, fourth and fifth chapters which are dedicated to the creative works of Shashi Deshpande and Vaidehi, it is proved that while the writers' works bring to centre-

stage feminist concerns, they do not stop at these issues alone. The writers uphold humanism with deep concern for the whole of humanity and exhibit genuine interest in the possibility of improving the quality of life. The fabric of their works is inlaid with the rich tapestry of emotions, both positive and negative, making one yearn for the victory of the virtuous over the vicious. But the realistic edge in their writing postulates that our lives are controlled by these dual forces and it is inevitable that the positive gets interlocked with the negative in the complex mosaic of life. The real triumph lies in the realisation that the power to choose is ours. The self-actualisation is the victory of the soul that refuses to be propelled by external forces. It is this facet of the writing of Deshpande and Vaidehi that voices their social concern. It is this edge that makes the research work paradoxical. Even as the researcher identifies the feminist concerns, the research work merges the distinction between feminism and humanism, expostulating the theory that feminism is one arm of humanism itself and that the locus of the works of these two writers is an earnest attempt to envisage an egalitarian society wherein justice is meted out to all, irrespective of sex, caste and class.

The study of the works of Deshpande and Vaidehi has ascribed prime importance to the conscious or unconscious rendering of critical theories in their works. In the first instance, through various works the writers have attempted to establish the importance of women's writing and the struggle behind women's writing. On the one hand, if there is a questioning of the androcentric assumption which considers women's writing trite, on the other, there is the assertion that even in the instances of women's writing being substandard, it is the outcome of various constraints peculiar to women writers alone. First of all, there is the problem of innumerable domestic interventions in the lives of women writers, that steal from them their moments of inspiration. Secondly, women have the problem of not getting equal opportunities to upgrade their knowledge in terms of

education and worldly knowledge. Thirdly, there is the problem of cultural censoring that raises objections to what society considers too bold a subject if broached by women although no such sanctioning constrains the literary output of men. It would be profitable to remember Vaidehi's words on the female experience shaping her writing. Discussing the possibility of women's familial experiences contributing towards their nurturing ability, Vaidehi argues that achieving temperance in literature as in life is not easy. But interestingly, a woman's first lessons of balancing act begin in the kitchen because it is in the culinary art more than anything else in life that one learns to get things 'just right'. Thus the seeds of woman's healthy world view are sown in the kitchen. This domestic principle turns a woman into a strong person, constructive in her general approach. She is able to maintain the quality of life and in turn improve the quality of life of the people around her.

Both Deshpande and Vaidehi have articulated the feminist agenda of establishing the presence and prominence of women's writing in the literary tradition. The schema, present in many works of Deshpande, becomes more pronounced in *Moving on* through the character of Vasu, who is a writer. Vasu is not an intellectual. She doesn't speak English with fluency. She has not even gone to school. In her life if lack of education is one limiting factor, the predicament of being at the receiving end of unending demands as mother is another. When children demand love, she has to give it and has no time of her own. The writer in her gets wiped out for years because she has to wipe noses and bottoms of her children while also feeding and dressing them. Her desire for freedom, freedom to be herself, freedom from the demands the children make of 'aamchi mai' cannot even be expressed because that would go against the concept of motherhood that society has ordained for women. Her *self* as a writer is absent in the forefront. Through her daughter Jiji's musings we see that the table in her parent's room is littered with

Baba's paper, his articles, his proof reading work, and Mai's work is never visible. The reference raises the question whether women-writers actually have a room or even a table of their own. With physical and inner space being denied can women writers escape the predicament of being mediocre? Yet Vasu keeps to her deadlines despite her disturbed, personal life, with complete professionalism. Her stories are read by a large number. If they come out as clichéd stories, there is another set of truths to reckon with. The sentimental stories which were earlier dismissed as dishonest and clichéd attempts by Jiji are viewed differently by her later. As a woman who has seen life, Jiji has the maturity to comprehend that one of the ploys used by women writers is to take everything that is unbearable in their lives and make it over into something entirely different. Jiji sees that Mai's grief at the neglect of her mother and the ugliness of senility is reflected in 'Annapoorna' in which a quilt, a rag in reality, is transformed into a symbol of love and togetherness. Thus we see that Deshpande's definitive mission in this novel is to prove that if one has to understand more than what meets the eye in the writings of women writers, one has to be sensitive to the situation in which they are placed and the metaphors they employ.

There is also the question of women writers who never came to the forefront. *The Binding Vine* has the case of a celebrated poet Venu telling Mira that it is enough for a young woman like her to give birth to children and consider that her poetry leaving the other poetry to men. On the other hand, we have Urmi who wonders if she could take Mira's life, a victim of marital rape, as the subject for higher studies. The speculation is clearly suggestive of the fact that such studies of women's private lives would be sociological studies of women's position and predicament in a given culture. It would also mean unearthing a secret woman writer who had burgeoning talent, but not a room of

her own, a woman writer, who had to write late in the night, like a thief, stealing away from bed, after the husband had slept.

In 'Hetthavara Pada Nenedu', although Vaidehi begins with references to her father, highlighting his respectability and dignity, her real subject is her mother. While conceding that her father was an orthodox in his approach to women, Vaidehi admits that it is her mother's influence she finds in her writing. Talking about her mother's natural flair for language, Vaidehi expresses the idea that if her mother had been a writer, she would have come up with finer representations than Vaidehi's. She also states that the only flaw of her mother lay in her objection to girls spending too much time on reading. This reveals the truth that her mother, a product of her time, wouldn't have ever considered the idea of becoming a writer. This in a way is also an explanation to the absence of many a woman writer in the canon of literature. Vaidehi thus takes up the feminine concern of explaining how too many flowers are born to blush unseen. In 'Sanna Thoreya Kalarava', comparing herself to a small stream, Vaidehi states with self deprecatory modesty that in the world of literature small writers like her are like streams that create flutters. She finds it intriguing that even after the sublime epic works like *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata,* people continue to make their contributions to the world of literature. It is evident that people still feel the compulsion to write and just as each individual breathes in her own pace, each writer, big or small, expresses herself irrespective of what has already been written. While comparing the canonical writers to forceful waterfalls, Vaidehi voices the opinion that smaller writers may feel self conscious about their writing but they would never have loathing towards their own writing. Vaidehi thus briefly touches upon the contributions of all writers who might not have been canonized. Further in an interview with Leela Karanth, wife of Jnanapeeta Awardee Dr.Shivarama Karanth, intentionally or unintentionally the interviewer does

highlight the shadowy existence of the wife of a renowned writer, who, it is clear, deserves her own share of glory. She is a writer who has penned down a few pieces but has never attempted to get them published. She is the one, who creates for her husband the atmosphere conducive for writing by playing with their children in the backyard. Even as Leela Karanth herself remains unequivocal in her assertion that women have imprisoned themselves and they are not imprisoned by others, the question that remains unasked but potent is, "If she herself had a room of her own and if many a moment of inspiration was not lost over the house hold chores, would she herself have shaped up as a renowned writer?" However, the relieving feature of the interview lies in the revelation that Karanth, an atheist, never imposed his views on his wife and she continued to be a staunch theist.

On the one hand, if the writers have focused on the predicament of women writers whose writing is affected by the interruptions in their lives, on the other, they have also referred to the areas of evasion which women writers are forced to adhere to. Prominent among these stigmatized themes is the subject of female sex and sexuality. Our society still prefers to regard women as almost asexual beings who are not expected to think or write about sex. So evasion is sometimes owing to external force, but quite often an internal choice as writers themselves refrain from writing about sex. Women writers keep making strategic choices about what to write about sex, how to write about sex and how much to write about sex as they cannot rid themselves completely of the fear of upsetting or embarrassing family and friends. Vaidehi's 'Antharangada Putagalu', 'Chandale', 'Atha', and 'Avalu Mathu Male' covered under her psycho-feminist concern prove that the writer has not elided references to female sexuality. 'Sougandhiya Swagathagalu', though listed under socio-feminist concern as it revolves around the idea of Sougandhi's desire for autonomy being thwarted by family and society, makes unambiguous

references to the passions of a single woman imprisoned under the garb of decency. However, in this sphere of sex and female sexuality we see that Deshpande is more explicit in her references. Beginning with *The Dark Holds No Terrors* till *Moving on*, her fictional world, be it of novels, be it of short stories, presents female sexuality without a mask. The daring rewriting of Shoorpanaka's story in *A Matter of Time* is Deshpande's avowal of female sexuality being unacceptable to patriarchy. By showing Shoorpanaka's desire as natural and by delineating Lakshmana and also Rama's condescension of Shoorpanaka's femininity as the male intolerance of the openness with which the female expressed her desire, Deshpande has two pertinent points to raise. Firstly, she shows that the present resistance to female sexuality can be traced back to the mythological roots and secondly she proves that the mythological basis has successfully implanted in the mind of women strong guilt and shame in acknowledging their sexuality. Indu of *Roots and Shadows* deconstructs the idea of women as passive recipients of pleasure. Perhaps it is her predicament of having to hide her passion that makes her experiment with an extra-marital relationship with Naren. Jaya of *That Long Silence* has a special bonding with Kamath though the bond does not culminate in physical relationship. Urmi of *The Binding Vine* whose husband is away for long spells of time talks about the necessity to put her desires into a deep freeze. Madhu of *Small Remedies* has had physical contact with a much older man as a young girl and her revelation of it to her husband, Som, after years of married life has a devastating effect although there is reconciliation later. 'A Man and a Woman' too ventures into projecting sex as a biological need. Deshpande's leit motif about sex in all her works is that too much unnecessary importance is attributed to a physical act which is one of the biological needs of the body, as natural as hunger and thirst. We see this idea being presented through widowed Jiji, who has a physical relationship with Raman in *Moving on*. However, Jiji is not free of guilt. Though Jiji is

aware that her starved body needs sex, the mind continues to be troubled. From the guilt of Jiji, it is clear that if the body represents nature, the mind stands for culture. It is neither easy nor appropriate to escape cultural determinations. This projection shows that even as Deshpande's motive is to detract the undue importance attached to physical acts, her stand on sex is not as radical as it is made out to be. The bottom-line remains that any relationship in which the body controls the mind is doomed to fail. Deshpande's final message is that as long as we are part and parcel of our society, if we do not follow societal norms, we will only torment ourselves. Does it mean that even writers like Deshpande, who appear to be bold in their treatment of sex, ultimately refuse to consider a paradigmatic shift in the treatment of the theme of female sex and sexuality? Not necessarily. The motive of writers like Deshpande is not to be iconoclastic of all that is held respectable by society. Their only plea is that what is considered natural with men, should be recognized as natural with women too, and rules and conditions which are laid in order to make life civilized and dignified should not be differential in the case of men and women. Further, there is mockery of how men bend the question of morality and make it relational according to the need of the hour. 'The Legacy' presents a man who encourages his wife into extra-marital relationships in order to hide his impotency and get heirs. The woman accepts the situation since the dictum comes from the husband. The ironic edge of the story is the mute question about the relational aspect of the very notion of morality.

The question of 'reader response' and the question if society is ready for the truths regarding women and revealed by women are brought to centre-stage in many works of Deshpande. Mai of *Moving on* who was popular with her dishonest stories becomes the target of inimical criticism when her short story 'Black Out' is published. The truth of the story which is brutal in its depiction of a battered wife, who intentionally leads a group of

rioters to her husband and has a sense of satisfaction when he is assaulted by them, is too raw for people to accept. On reading this story of her mother, Jiji realizes that the story has as its basis Mangal, Laxman's wife, who had gone to Vasu after being assaulted by Laxman. Thus, it is clear that 'Black Out' presents the stark reality of life, but it is for this story that Mai receives most severe criticism from the public. However, it is the story which Laxman's daughter thinks of making into a movie. The difference in the readers' responses once again points out that a story is received differently by different people depending upon their life-experience and mental make up. Jaya of *That Long Silence* is an additional example of the predicament of women writers and the truth that the process of writing and the process of reception are different in the case of women writers. If the process of writing involves restrictions both psychological and physical, the process of reception has a different but equally unpleasant story to recount. When men write a piece, it is the written material that becomes the subject of criticism; but in the case of a woman writer, the writer becomes the subject of discussion. The distinction between the writer and the speaker is forgotten. Jaya's husband Mohan is upset that Jaya's negative picturisation of the husband would make her readers think of Mohan as guilty. Jaya's creative impulse is stifled and silenced when she is accused by Mohan of having revealed too much of their personal lives to the public. Madhu of *Small Remedies* is an answer to these male dictates. Although initially she makes the mistake of catering to the demands of popularity in what she sketches in the biography of Hamidbai, when it comes to the question of writing the biography of Savitribai Indroreker, she is resolute in voicing what she perceives to be the truth. This decision of a woman writer writing on another woman is indicative of the refusal of women and women writers to succumb to the demands of propriety that are chalked out by patriarchy.

Thus both Deshpande and Vaidehi have brought into the framework of their creative writing critical theories about women's writing which include significant observations about the importance of women's writing, the need to understand and appreciate the different idiom and metaphor employed in women's writing, the interrupted nature of women writers' existence and its impact on their writing, the areas of evasion thrust upon women writers, and the reasons behind the absence of women writers in the literary canon. Many myths about women writers and women's writing get exploded and rewritten as Deshpande and Vaidehi use the creative genre to explore critical theories.

This, however, is one of the peripheral themes in the works of Deshpande and Vaidehi. The central concern remains the difference made by gender in women's existence. Through their writings, the writers have tried to reshape the world so as to introduce new contours that accommodate women with selfhood. Their claim is for personhood because at the familial level the *double bind,* a situation in which women are forced to choose between equally unsatisfactory alternatives, continues to imprison women in its loop. It is this double bind that the intensely introspective protagonists of Deshpande try to escape be it Sarita, be it Jaya, be it Indu, and be it Jiji. Sarita's awareness that "You are your own refuge" is the final understanding of all the central characters of Deshpande. However, Vaidehi's women are less sure of their selves or aren't aware of their selves. Although we have rare examples such as that of Shubha Aunty in 'Ogatu' who resolutely maintains a private self, Ajji in 'Alivu Ulivugala Naduve' who refuses to tonsure her head at the time of her husband's death and Vani Mai who throws a pair of sandals at her oppressor, even as she is on the throes of death; the world of women in Vaidehi's stories is largely inhabited by helpless women such as the five generations of women in "Puttamathe Matthu Mommagalu', two generation of

women in 'Babuli, Thayee Matthu Naseebu', Siri in 'Hakkilladhavaru', Ammacchi in 'Ammacchi Emba Nenapu', Chikka in 'Chikkana Satyagraha', Doddamma in 'Bhutha', Akku in 'Akku', Athe in "Jathre', Ratna in 'Nati', Bharathi in 'Shodha', Bacchamma in 'Ondhu Kalla Vritthantha' and a host of others who are all victims of cruelcircumstances, which turn some of them into *manku*, a Kannada word for madness. Vaidehi shows how the problems of women impact their mind. If poverty, illiteracy and unemployment are shown to be the causes in some cases, in most of the cases, the suffering is ascribed to male hegemony. Vaidehi's stance here is to prove that what is seen and also shunned as the private problem of women is in reality a social problem, the roots of which go back to the institution of marriage or the structure of society. 'Oata', which presents the situation of a wife who is brutally beaten up by her husband, receiving no help from even sympathetic neighbours, is a striking example of women's problem remaining unanswered as society holds the notion that privacy in marriage is inviolable. Thus we see that if Deshpande's middle-class women fight objectification, Vaidehi's subaltern women try to escape victimization. If Deshpande's protagonists are travellers in the quest for identity and purpose of life, Vaidehi's central characters are jaded women, eking out livelihood, in their simple, mundane, routine existence. Yet all of them, despite their differences invert traditional norms and stereotypical clichés of womanhood, creating cultural spaces for women. Even when the women are self-effacing entities, the purpose of the writers is not to glorify or endorse the unhealthy trends in a traditional set-up. Just as they focus on 'what ought to be', they throw light on 'what ought not to be'. Through their subtle, subversive writing, they highlight the hypocrisy of a society, irrationality of a tradition and liberate women from the images imposed on them through countless generations of Indian womanhood. In this attempt, the writers reimage the concept of motherhood too. The portrayals of mothers, both positive and negative, are with the

understanding that mothers are often the unconscious tools of patriarchy, perpetuating the wrong done to them, without a conscious understanding of what they are doing. If Deshpande's *The Dark Dark Holds No Terrors* has a graphic representation of such mothers, Vaidehi's 'Ammacchiyemba Nenapu' unravels another chink in the mother-daughter relationship. The central concern of the story is Veeratthe, the mother of Ammacchi. Isn't it her total dependence on a male figure after the death of her husband that spells doom for her and her daughter? The lack of support from the mother to the daughter is the root cause of the daughter's suffering. Although Ammacchi escapes the noose of remaining married to Venkappayya through out her life, the tragedy has already struck because Ammacchi is a disillusioned, disappointed, bitter woman in the concluding part of the story. However, the motive of the writers is to ravel the truth that dominating mothers who seem to be wielding power are often a foil to the powerlessness of them at home and in society. That is why, if the negative examples seek the understanding of a sympathetic reader, the positive projections show mothers with emotive capacity to nurture and cooperate. Kalyani of Deshpande's *A Matter of Time,* despite being wronged through out her life, never loses her nurturing capacity. Vaidehi's Bacchamma in 'Ondhu Kalla Vritthantha', with all her faults and frivolities is a caring mother. Thus as the writers continue unabated in their inexorable attempts at rewriting myths, we see that the familial oppression turns out to be the spy-hole through which one can glimpse the larger social oppression and political oppression. While analyzing the reasons for oppression, there is a strident refusal to accept the negative script offered by the dominant culture, freeing the self from concocted sense of inferiority. When we read their texts through the prism of identity, we see that they question the role of family, which goes against the concept of a just society, in controlling women. But the moral authority with which the writers attempt reformulation has not gone unopposed.

As premised in the introduction, the invisible forces in society are so strong that not only men but also women have been accepting as natural what is purely constructed. The most influential factor in constructing false images of women is the world of myths. Deshpande's talk "The Indian woman - Stereotypes, Images and Realities" throws clear light on the situation:

> ... but there is no doubt that these women from the myths are a very powerful influence on us even today. To be as pure as Sita, as loyal as Draupadi, as beautiful as Lakshmi, as bountiful a provider as Annapoorna, as dogged in devotion as Savitri, as strong as Durga - these are all the ultimate role models we cannot entirely dismiss. What is intriguing is that men are not expected to act up to the counterparts of these female role models; nobody expects a man to be a Rama or a Krishna, an Arjuna or a Lakshman. The examples are, it seems, held out only to women. It seems odd that it took us women so long to realise this truth, to understand why this is so. A particular story, in which a woman refuses to disturb her husband's sleep even to save her child from falling into the fire, first opened my eyes. This was a man's story, it was told by him from his point of view. Therefore, understandably, he put himself first. In effect he is saying - Your duty to ME comes first. Even the children come second.[4]

It is this awareness of the feminine being filtered through male-consciousness that has urged the creative writers to read powerful male-oriented myths and tales from the angle that would accommodate the feminine version. In India one of the oft-used claims about women being treated respectfully is the argument that almost all male Gods have the female in them. We say Sitarama, Lakshminarayana with the female coming first. But we have feminine entity in neither the Trinity nor the Dashavathara. Moreover, if Vishnu in

his female form is a seductress, Sita is helpless and Draupadi not more than a pawn. In the *Samudra Manthana* if all stakeholders are male, the apsaras, the heavenly nymphs are at the disposal of not only Gods but also demons. When women writers exhibit their consciousness of such projections being skewed, they run the risk of being considered radical and immoral. That is why writers like Deshpande and Vaidehi who have reread and rewritten myths from the feminine point of view, subverting the existing masculine version should be regarded as cultural critics whose works make rich contributions towards creating an equable society. If the stories of Sachidevi, Amba, Kunti, Gandhari and Draupadi are rewritten by Deshpande, the story of Shakunthala is approached through feminine consciousness by Vaidehi. The lives of these revered mythological women have been rewritten with the intention of showing that their models over the years have acted as the ideological apparatus in society in determining the social and cultural mores for women and imposing false consciousness on them. Although the stories of Sita and Savitri have not been rewritten, in many places there are references to the constricting Sita-Savitri cast that is imposed on women though no man has ever been saddled with the image of Rama or any other ideal. If Deshpande's 'A Wall Is Safer' refers to a man who has the name of Srirama, but ill-treats his wife, 'Travel Plans' touches upon the possibility of the ideal of Krishna making men less guilty of polygamy. Vaidehi has subtle references to the latter in 'Mareyadavaru'. Although the myth of Krishna with Gopikas has been projected with spirituality at its core, the general image is of a man surrounded by many women. The divine significance of the *atma* merging with the *paramatma* is less powerful than the projection of man as having the right to be with a bevy of women. Although the Bakthi Rasa is supposed to have prominence, Shringara Rasa is more potent. All in all, the very image of Lord Krishna is a convenient means for men to justify their escapades with women. The protagonist of 'The Wall is Safer' who

follows her husband to the village, giving up her career and Jaya of *That Long Silence* who follows her ignominious husband are Deshpande's projection of the Sita cult. Deshpande and Vaidehi through their writings try to trace the creators who created the Sita-Savitri-Shakti mould imposing images on women and then broke it barring every route of escape for women. The writers' intention is to liberate women from the self-imposed censorship in the name of love and loyalty. The writers encourage women in particular and society in general to ponder over the absence of even a single example of the same kind as far as manhood is concerned. Jaya's awareness of the self and her emergence from the shadow of her husband with the motivating words 'Yathecchasi tatha kuru' is Deshpande's vision for the future. In Vaidehi's 'Shakunthaleyondige Kaleda Aparahna', Kalidasa, a male writer, is accused of coming up with his version of the curse which is a ploy to cover the irresponsible behaviour of men. Shakunthala consciously rejects Dhushyantha because she has seen through the deceit of Dhushyantha. The same sentiment is echoed in Deshpande's 'A Day like Any Other'. By picturing the wife who remains calm even after discovering her husband's infidelity, Deshpande wants to deconstruct two myths. She boldly states that a wife's life does not come to an end if her husband abandons her; rather, it could mean a new beginning. Unlike the usual *Sati-Savitris* of popular fiction and media projections and contrary to Manu's dictum that an ideal wife should accept her husband despite all his vices, the wife in the story does not accept the husband after his escapade. His life is his, her life is hers. With a single stroke of her pen, Deshpande proves the popularly held myth of the wife waiting eternally for her husband even when he is a philanderer to be the wishful desire of a patriarchal society. Left on her own, a woman, would not languish for the debauching husband. If she does, it is only because of the cultural parameters and it is necessary to liberate such a woman who has been under the influence of such social mores by showing to her that the

conditions are unnatural. Deshpande and Vaidehi also touch upon other genres of literature to show that along with the influence of myths there is also the impact of folklore and legend in shaping the consciousness of a given set of people. In the novel *A Matter of Time* the folk story 'The Gardener's Son' gets rewritten by Sumi, the protagonist. She rereads it and even stages it in the course of the novel. Unlike Kalyani who meekly submits to the will of her mother, forgetting the man who sent her love letters, the princess manages to marry the gardener's son by plotting to have him as the winner in identifying the 'rice and curds' tree. Thus the subversive writing of Deshpande overturns the rules of the game in a subtle manner. The write up 'Aho Yaradhalli' by Vaidehi makes a casual reference to the stereo-typical descriptions of women in the songs sung by the rural women at work. If the sister-in-law is always a monster, it is but natural for a husband to be a philanderer. That the children joined in the singing explains the stereo-typical images that are ingrained in the mind of men and women through invisible ways. In 'Ondhu Bhagila Saddhu' Vaidehi refers to *Brihannaradhiya, Padma Purana* etc. to question the constriction which decrees that women cannot touch the *Saligrama*. The strength of the story lies in the fact that after this sacrilegious act of touching the sacred stone, instead of feeling guilty, the speaker feels light and liberated. Remarkably, contrary to what she had heard, there is no untoward happening either. This is Vaidehi's way of showing that certain taboos imposed on women should be broken by women themselves if women are to be truly liberated. Deshpande in 'The Stone Women' has presented the idea that even in the art form of sculptures, the 'female' is sculpted according to male desire. In the voluptuous figures of the stone women, Deshpande sees male idea of what a woman should be. Thus the writers re-interpret mythology, scripture, folklore and art forms and rewrite them so as to subvert the canonic versions. Again, even in this sphere, we can clearly see that the reconstruction of the socio-cultural values is not

a polemical stand. It is the writers' attempts at mediating between tradition marked by patriarchy and modernity marked by personhood. Moreover, their concern is also to show that myths can have incapacitating impact on men too. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* pictures Manu turning into a schizophrenic because of his sense of inadequacy in his position as the less educated, less successful husband of a lady doctor. Deshpande sensitively projects the fall of a man who had poetic sensibility in his young age, turning into a beast deriving sadistic pleasure in physically torturing the wife in the darkness of the night. Vaidehi's 'Kraunchа Pakshigalu' pictures the deceit of Ashwatha Bhatta who grieves over his supposedly lost wife, whom in fact, he rejects after she has been lost and found at the time of India-Pakisthan partition. The rejection which takes place in Ayodhya is reminiscent of Lord Rama's denunciation of Sita. However, Vaidehi abstains from drawing conclusions on the sincerity of the grief of Ashwatha Bhatta because Ashwatha Bhatta could have rejected his wife despite his love for her because of societal norms that curtail man's freedom of choice by dictating to him what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. Thus the authors take up the cudgels against unnatural condemning *per se* although it is true that the balance weighs heavily on the side of women.

The writers' unconventional approach can be seen in their themes of lesbianism and marital rape considered taboo by purists. If Vaidehi makes oblique references to lesbianism in 'Abha', Deshpande has overt allusions to it in 'The Widow'. The strength of the writers lies in the fact that they abstain from being judgmental towards such people who are considered perverts in the traditional set up. If Deshpande's 'Intrusion' and *The Binding Vine* make disturbing allusions to marital rape with a plea for emotional bonding, Vaidehi's 'Antharalada Rodhuku' refers to the strategies planned by the wife to escape unwanted sex in marriage. In 'Theeyada Putagalu' the mystery surrounding the obsession of the wife with rape and the possibility of every girl being raped remains

enigmatic, leaving the reader to ponder over the possibility of the wife herself being raped on the night of *Shobhana.* Although the plight of the widows does not take centre-stage in the writings of either Deshpande or Vaidehi, there isn't total omission of it either. In Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* the finer shades of the character of dominating Akka, a widow are brought out by Atya, another widow. Akka is spurned by a husband, who keeps a concubine and victimized by a mother-in-law, who forces a girl of a tender age to have sex with the husband who continues to be a stranger. The tragedy of her existence, according to Atya, could be seen in the fact that she could never give birth to a living child. The silent enduring has another facet to it. It is slowly replaced by bitterness and a diabolic wish to dominate. Vaidehi's *Asprushyaru* too has a sensitive portrayal of Parthakka who is caught in the politics of caste. In 'Muru Makaragala Naduve', 'Adu Beda Idu Beda Udalu Thodalu Beda', 'Balege Bagi, 'Jakani Bidisida Shridhara Swamigalu', and 'Mangalada Margavagi', all featuring in her autobiographical writing, Vaidehi traces the tragic plight as well as the constant progress of Hindu widows. Vaidehi marvels at the unquestioning acceptance of their fate on the part of the widows and concedes that earlier even for people like her the plight of the widows hadn't appeared to be extraordinary as it was accepted as normal. Their frustration was viewed as spirits haunting them and widows themselves seemed to believe in this myth. While acceding that the status of women has improved to a great extent over the years, Vaidehi opines that women are not completely free of subjugation in the name of custom and tradition. The diverse themes are indicative of the authors' profound involvement with the 'female experience'. Their creative spirit gets into every corner of female psyche and paints vividly what is perceived as the truth. But in their pursuit of truth, the writers do not circumscribe their quest to the world of women alone. Other concerns as urbanization, geriatrics, interpersonal relations, democratic existence and power of words

are brought into their creative canvas as well. The writers have come up with two different facets of Urbanisation. In *A Matter of Time* Deshpande explicitly refers to the sense of alienation urbanization has led to. But Vaidehi has an unusual take on the concept of urbanization. In 'Jagadheka Car Veera'. The piece is an index to the need for eco-friendly measures in modern times. While referring to the ownership of cars as scarce in the earlier times, Vaidehi incidentally refers to house-warming ceremonies too being rare then. The reference is worth elaborating on. With the joint family system almost coming to null, the number of houses being built has also gone up and the extent to which it has hit our ecology hasn't been seriously dealt with by intellectuals and writers. Although we associate the building of houses with deforestation and urbanization, hardly do we connect the environmental issue to the changed family structures. Thus Shashi Deshpande and Vaidehi emerge as two contemporary writers who have not sacrificed moving humanistic concerns while dealing with complex feministic issues such as the importance of women's writing, need to unearth women writers, conditioning mythic modes, debilitating cultural norms, female sexuality, servility, and selfhood. On the one hand if their writings attempt to mildly scoff at social ills, on the other they attempt to recast women as subjects rather than agents in the making of history. While trying to understand and anlyse the creative works of Shashi Deshpande and Vaidehi, the following conclusions can be arrived at:

- In the works of Shashi Deshpande and Vaidehi, there are powerful questions about social inequalities. Although it is true that the general concern is for the whole of humanity, the questions become pointed when they revolve around women. This makes both Deshpande and Vaidehi humanists in general and feminists in particular. Feminism is not an act of prophesying with the tendency to be prescriptive but a step taken towards human rights. Perhaps Deshpande and

Vaidehi have repeatedly avowed that they should not be labelled as feminists because feministic writing is often circumscribed to the limits of raising a banner of protest with the zeal of a propagandist. But if feminism is viewed as the movement that questions inequality and injustice in general, it emerges as a moral pursuit and not a polemical stance. The feminist leaning in the writers is the natural outcome of being born as women and having the first-hand experience of what it means to be women in the Indian society. However, it is not the parochial and fanatical reaction of rebels, but mature and melancholic response of thinkers who can understand the predicament of women because, in smaller or greater measure, every woman in India is discriminated against. Since the writers' appeal is for an egalitarian society, their angst is over every form of discrimination and hence they raise their voice against the discrimination meted out to all marginalised sections of society. Hence it can be easily surmised that the extended vision of both the writers is their humanism.

- Neither Shashi Deshpande nor Vaidehi is a radical feminist as it is reformulation within the structures of the existing society and family and not rejection of them that serves as an indicator to solutions for troubling issues revolving around gender inequality and oppression. Sometimes if the pointer is directed towards the self as in the case of middle class women, some other times socio-political revivalism is hinted at as in the case of many a hapless female protagonist, victims of social and political injustice, proving that women's predicament is as much a social and political problem as it is a familial dilemma. In the writings of Deshpande and Vaidehi, it is not the facile opposition to patriarchy, but earnest efforts to gain agency in a society which has systematically denied women autonomy.

- In the works of Shashi Deshpande and Vaidehi one can discern socio-feminist-psycho-Marxist-feminism, a little of everything, as the theme demands. If socio-feminists question false representations of women, semio-feminists study the science of signs, the signifying practices by means of which the female sex is 'gendered' and given its social roles. If psycho-feminists articulate feminine desires and show their repression, Marxist-feminists are more concerned about oppression than repression. The writers extrapolate these theories bringing them into the framework of creative writing. However, what is remarkable is that these concerns are interwoven into the tapestry of narration without sacrificing the artistic edge. Moreover, there is equal concern for the progress of humanity as a whole without any section of society being victimized. This is not surprising because even at its most basic and fundamental level, feminism concerns itself with human rights. As the affected person is the woman, feminism in the place of humanism turns out to be the trope.

- The questioning is done in the framework of artificial conditioning of women and the main tool used is debunking popularly held images of women. It is proved without a trace of doubt that at the basis of social and familial conditioning is the vast world of myth-making. That the religion itself is a contributor towards myth-making is established by rereading and rewriting the stories of mythological characters hitherto accepted as sacrosanct.

- Education and self-reliance through education are shown as one of the possible answers to the problems of women. In the fictional world of Deshpande and Vaidehi, we see that in the case of women belonging to the lower rungs of society, it is their dependence on men for their living that leaves them with no option of

escaping male atrocity. This makes social reform, a theme to be reckoned with in their writings, whether the writers themselves have consciously taken it up as their agenda or not.

- Feminist theoretical ideas are appropriated and reworked in the works of Deshpande and Vaidehi and the generative influence of feminist theories which is clearly discernible in their works supports the premise that their creative works are also critical debates about the positioning of women in society. The critical edge in the creative works of these two writers, when recognized as important intellectual debates of the contemporary time, can lead to significant social changes. The creative writings of both the writers should be recognized for their creative, intellectual, ethical, moral and social contributions.

It is true that in these concerns neither Deshpande nor Vaidehi is markedly different from other women writers of their time. Between the two of them too, the general strains are almost the same. The differences are peripheral and superficial than profound. If Deshpande's women are victims of their own being, Vaidehi's women are victims of fate. If the inner, introspective world of middle class women is more pronounced in the works of Deshpande, the stark naked world of poverty of rural women takes centre stage in the writings of Vaidehi; both, however, have an occasional foray into other spheres. This difference in the target groups is significant. It shows that despite the differences in their social and familial backgrounds, women continue to be the oppressed lot. In the case of educated women, if it is subtle, in the case of the illiterates, it is blatant. Patriarchy runs through as the common debilitating force in the world of women.

This brings us to the final question. How do we change these unjust equations? Will women writers in particular and women in general continue to face the predicament of the proverbial blanket which when asked, "Where are you lying now?" replied, "Wherever I was thrown last."?

What Vaidehi has to say in her autobiographical work *Lekhakhiya Putagalu* can be remembered here. While discussing the stage of puberty Vaidehi questions the attitude of considering menstrual cycle impure. Even as she acknowledges that customs are less rigid in her time, she wryly adds that her mother too felt the same about her time. Vaidehi points out that even though things have changed for the better for women, there are still many more things to be desired before patriarchy can be absolved of its guilt. Even now it is necessary to apprehend and document women as subjects, whose role and efforts remain unacknowledged, despite being integrated into the public realm.

One of the solutions creatively integrated into the works of the writers is the possibility of women coming together as a community of women with empathy for one another. If Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* makes explicit references to this possibility of sisterhood, Vaidehi too has delineated abiding relationships among women, be it of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law as in 'Alivu Ulivugala Naduve, maid and mistress as in *Asprushyaru*, owner and tenant as in 'Avashesha' or chance acquaintances as in 'Payanadallina Hudugi' and 'Prashnottharagala Ache'. It is pertinent to remember that both writers remain unequivocal in their assertion that family acts as a binding force in the lives of people. If the very title *Roots and Shadows* by Deshpande has explicit references to family acting as an anchoring force despite the daunting challenges it poses, Vaidehi attributes her evolution as a writer to the rich experiences she had in her childhood, by belonging to a family that had its doors open to all the relatives. This focus

results from the knowledge that solutions for women's problems should spring from private spheres rather than public domains. That is why the main concern of the research scholar is to show that there are many women's issues which are beyond the premises of legal reforms and these are the most problematic ones which have denied women the dignity and authority of the *self.* The existing equations, while grudgingly accepting women in authoritative positions in the public world, still expect them to play second fiddle to male authority on the home front. Manu's dictum that women should be supplicants to male authority as wives, mothers and sisters still rules our society.

While symposia and workshops on women's issues are trying to do their best, the issues discussed on such platforms can hardly tackle the subtlety or complexity of gender discrimination and the unnatural process of gendering. The truth is that just as conditioning itself is the outcome of ideological forces operating in society, reimaging should also target ideological apparatus such as education, mass media, literature etc. to achieve the desired end. It is in this framework that writers like Deshpande and Vaidehi turn out to be the scribes who at one level, attempt 'consciousness erasing' and at another 'consciousness raising'.

The juxtaposing of the two writers writing in two different languages, who have so much in common in their thematic concerns, naturally calls for an analysis of their effectiveness as writers writing in different languages. The oft-asked question when a writer writes in a language that is not her own is whether an alien language can carry the burden of a native tongue. This question is raised in view of the fact that the writer belongs to two traditions – one of language and another of culture.

Deshpande's contestation is that mother tongue need not necessarily be the language of creativity. The reasons could be mixed marriages, the language of education

being different, the mother tongue being lost due to some dislocation or the mother tongue not leading to the best creative expression. English, in such cases, can turn out to be the language of creative expression. However, the fact remains that languages do not develop in a vacuum, and they are rooted in a cultural context. Myths, memories, histories, proverbs and idioms are all part of it. Hence if the question is of two different languages with different cultural baggage, there could be a doubt about the ability of the writer in succeeding at making an alien language carry the burden of a native culture. Deshpande acknowledges that when an Indian writer is writing in English, it is a kind of translation because she is all the time translating the words of characters who would have expressed themselves in regional languages. In such a situation, the question that arises is whether the reading of such works has to be different. While conceding that all Indian Writing in English, in a way, is translation, Deshpande is of the opinion that the naturalness of her writing lies in the fact that her readers are the ones who read English although they have experienced their personal and emotional lives in their own languages. This understanding facilitates her smooth move from language to culture and culture to language. Deshpande agrees that writing in English implies a continued process of self-censorship which may lead to the loss of complexity of our lives. So, for a writer writing in a foreign language, it is imperative that she create a sense of complexity. Deshpande achieves this with the use of culturally internalised tales. Thus, Deshpande has no problems in moving from language to culture and vice-versa. The internalizing of known stories and myths prioritizes human experiences and thereby the human being becomes the most important entity. For Deshpande, the ultimate is the experience and the success of the language employed, whether vernacular or English, depends on holding the experience together. Deshpande's words would erase any misgiving about the justice done by Indian writers writing in English to Indian subject matter:

> To those of us who write in English, it is neither a foreign language, nor the language of the colonizer, but the language of our creativity. Whether the writing is rootless, alienated or elitist, should be judged from the writing, not from the language. My writing, comes out of myself, the society I live in, it is shaped as I am, by my family, my ancestry, the place I was born in, the place I live in, the culture I am steeped in. The fact that the writing is in English changes none of these things.[5]

Even if Deshpande's choice of language might have restricted her readership, it wouldn't have acted as a constraint on her choice of subject matter or milieu. The question whether the writing is rootless, alienated or elitist, should be judged from the writing, and not the language. Deshpande is natural in using a foreign language and her language can be described as contemporary, middle-class, Indian-English without the consciousness of addressing a western audience. Nevertheless, the task is not easy because a woman writer writing in English about the plight of women must necessarily avoid the peril of giving a wrong image of Indian women to a foreign audience. It is here that Deshpande earns credit richly. Whether her stories revolve around middle class women or women of lower rungs, she presents them with stark reality and complete empathy without a trace of artificiality. With her lives and experiences being firmly rooted in India, she remains tied to Indian rather than imported contents. However, one cannot overlook the fact that Deshpande's subaltern characters serve only as a foil to the middle class women, with the working class women themselves being nothing substantial. Except for *The Binding Vine*, in the vast fictional world of Deshpande, women of the lower rungs of society remain in the periphery never taking centre-stage, unlike the protagonists of Vaidehi who present a rich array of women from the underprivileged sections of society. The travails of these victimized women are pictured with such pathos by Vaidehi that the readers are likely to

feel some kind of impotent rage towards the injustice that is meted out to these hapless women. The situation does bring to one's mind the question of the thematic difference the language of expression would lead to and perhaps it is true that Deshpande does not choose to write about the lower class women who will not be able to carry the burden of the foreign language. But then, can one curtail the freedom of the writer in the choice of the subject matter? The focus should be, instead, on how authentic the delineation of the chosen subject is. In this regard, Deshpande's prowess remains unchallenged even as Vaidehi's adroitness in employing a regional dialect of Kannada to bring to life her characters stands unparalleled. Whether it is Deshpande writing in English or Vaidehi writing in Kannada, the thematic concerns are bound together by the beauty of language which never fails to satisfy the aesthetic sense. In both motive and mode, their works are artistic achievements. What a casual reader might consider artlessness is, in fact, the strength of the writers. Their works do not follow the Aristotelian pattern of Exposition-Climax-Denouement. The wriers are rather Frostian in their tact in transforming simple, routine happenings into edifying experiences. They exploit an ordinary situation to reveal extraordinary truths about human beings. This maturity is a testimony to their aestheticism. In fact, the profound philosophical ruminations in Deshpande and Vaidehi's works can be taken as the possible areas of research although the reflections of the two writers are embedded in two different categories of women. From the very first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* to *Moving on*, Deshpande concretizes abstract philosophical notions through the intense stream-of-consciousness narrative mode of her protagonists, both female and male. As the novelist moves from Bhavabhuthi to Dhammapada through Frost and Dickens, we have abstruse references to the essence of life. One should accede that Vaidehi's creative world is devoid of such intensity. Her fish-mongers and bangle-sellers spring out of every day life, bringing to the forefront the struggle of the have-nots

for their very survival. Their philosophy might not centre on existential absurdities or the sense of alienation acutely felt by the characters appearing in the fictional world of Deshpande. Nevertheless, Vaidehi's projections epitomize the lived reality of ordinary people who have to live their lives whether they make sense out of their living or not. It is interesting that Vaidehi can turn into literary expressions ordinary incidents like distribution of milk powder, asphalting of the road etc. without sacrificing the artistic edge of creative writing. The feeling her writing produces initially is, "Is it a subject worth writing about?" In the second instance, the thought is, "Any one can write on such simple subjects." But the final revelation is that Vaidehi's strength lies in her simplicity and such simplicity is within the reach of only those gifted writers who have given up complexity for the virtue of simplicity. This feature of deceptive simplicity is evident in 'Neenallade Naanalla Alla', 'Kumariyaru Thorida Dhairya', 'Ammaniddhare Deepaveke?' 'Adhe Damaram' and 'Drummare Drum' to mention a few.

While tackling the question of 'absences' in their writing, it is discernible that while both Deshpande and Vaidehi minutely scrutinize every facet of female experience from childhood to old age, hardly do they deal with the problem of foeticide and infanticide as an off-shoot of androcentric society. Even when Deshpande refers to an instance of abortion in 'Death of a Child', it is not to discuss the problem of female foeticide. It is, instead, the trope that deconstructs the idea that motherhood is always a pleasure for a woman. The aim of the story is also to show the truth that men, who otherwise deny the role of decision-makers to women, expect them to take their own decisions when it comes to sensitive issues like abortion. This gives men the chance to absolve themselves of guilt and make women feel like sinners. Deshpande's *That Long Silence* has passing references to mothers' unwillingness to have daughters, not because they long for sons, but because they do not want their daughters to suffer the fate they

themselves have suffered from or have seen other girls suffer from. Equally sparse is the reference to the problem of prostitution. If Deshpande takes it up peripherally in *Come up and be Dead*, Vaidehi in her autobiographical writing, 'Adhunikatheya Punyaphala' refers to the women who, thanks to modernity, have escaped the ignominy of being the concubines of the rich. It can be observed that the problem of dowry hardly takes centre stage on the creative platform of Deshpande and Vaidehi even if one remembers Vaidehi's powerful analogy between a buffalo to be sold and a girl to be 'seen' by the groom's party in 'Beelu Bheru'. May be the writers' fiercely intense 'stream of consciousness' narrative technique and realistic mode make them concentrate on the lived experiences of women in their inner courtyard rather than take up the cudgels to fight those evils which have been contested by active feminists and reformists. The omission could be intentional as the more visible ills of society attract the attention of visual arts and are often the subjects of plays and movies. If the larger canvas of the novels facilitates Deshpande and Vaidehi to consider more challenging questions of autonomy and how one's identity as woman makes one vulnerable to cultural hegemony as well as other inequalities in society, the characteristic features of which are stereotyping, erasure, appropriation, violence, exploitation, marginalization and powerlessness, the smaller canvas of short stories enables them to come up with the snap-shots of women and men from diverse fields with their discursive problems.

The research proves clearly that while favouring psychological explorations of women's condition, the writers do not ignore social and political problems. Even while dealing with the complexities of women's lives, they emerge as educators who by deconstructing the false images of women, solidified for centuries, establish feminine realism as against mythical realism in order to both demystify and demythify womanhood. Since both have been occupied with creative writing for more than four

decades, their writing, in a way, turns out to be a literary recordation of social changes. The study of the creative engagement of the writers with the contemporary issues assimilated in the rubric of their writing has offered a glimpse of what they hold for the future. Their works, if studied as texts would contribute towards attitudinal changes and make our society equable. It is their writing that can engage academic and non-academic communities in dialogues on women's subject positions. This would add relevance to both development and academic programmes, which in turn would lead to equitable and sustainable life forms. Such dissemination of knowledge would slowly but surely lead to meaningful interactions among women themselves and make them focus on their position in society. If the writers' contributions towards the welfare of society are perceived in the right spirit, the writers emerge as social reformers who, by studying the past and challenging its ramifications in the present, hold promises for the future.

# NOTES

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[1] Shashi Deshpande, "Writing and Activism." *Writing Difference: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande.* Ed. Chanchala K, Naik. (Delhi; Pencraft International, 2005) 22.

[2] Vaidehi, *Meju Matthu Badagi.* (Prasaranga, Kannada University: Hampi, 2007) 190 - 92.

[3] ---, *Nannannu Rupisida Parisara..*A Talk in a Seminar on *Vaidehiyavara Samagra Sahithya Baravanigegala Chinthane* at Mangalore University on 5.2.2010 and 6.2.2010.

[4] The talk was delivered on 30 October 1997, in Zürich under the auspices of The Swiss-India Society Zürich and The Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich.

[5] Sarala Palkar, "Of Mothers and Daughters. Of the Great Divide: Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine.*" *The Postmodern Indian English Novel: Interrogating the 1980s and 1990s.* (Bombay: Allied Publishers Ltd., 1996) 172.

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*Ashaya Bhashana* by B. N. Sumithrabai.

*Vaidehiyavara Sahithya* by M. S. Krishnayya.

*Vaidehiyavara Kavya* by Dr. U. Maheshwari.

*Vaidehiyavara Kadambari* by Dr. Vijayashri Sabarada.

*Vaidehi Kathana Sahithyadalli Pradeshika Samskruthi* by Dr. Sabitha Bannady.
*Prabhandha Sahithya* by Dr. M. V. Vasu.

*Nenapinangala: Athma Kathana* by Dr. Latha.

*Kathana Sahithyadhalli Lingeeya Rajakarana* by Dr. Meera L. G.

*Vaidehiyavara Natakagalu* by Dr. Narasimha Moorthy.

*Chinthane* by Dr. Chinnappa Gowda.

## M Phil Dissertations and Ph D Theses of Hampi University

### M Phil Dissertations

*Vaidehi Kathegala Samajika Hagu Samskruthika Adhyayana* by Manjula K. R. under the guidance of Dr. Ganesh K. R.

*Vaidehiyavara Aydha Kathegalalli Strivadi Nota* by Sujatha N. under the guidance of Dr. Manjula Priyadharshini.

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### Ph D Theses

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